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Welcome to the Circus: finding ways to artistically express the martial way

A study of the merger of martial arts and theatre

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University

Director: Dr. Noreen Barnes

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Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

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Acknowledgments

I believe that we are all products of our ancestors. Within us we carry the life, spirit, and tenacity of those who walked before us. I am a reflection of those who have lived and sacrificed for me to live. With this acknowledgement, I understand that my ancestry exist in many forms, for which I am thankful. I recognize and respect my blood ancestry, as well as my cultural ancestry; without them, none of my work would be possible today.

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shrouded in many tears, heart shattering moments and questions of doubt but with the support of you all I have made it through and come to understand that I do belong.

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Let the work continue!

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgement	ii
Abstract	v
Introduction.....	vii
Directing for the Theatre.....	vii
Personal Affirmation.....	xiii
Martial Arts Philosophy.....	xiv
Philosophy of Teaching	xviii
Chapters	
1 The Genesis.....	1
The Martial Structure	5
2 The Martial with the Arts.....	8
Story creation	9
Rehearsal format.....	10
Ensemble building.....	14
Remounting the M.A. Cirque	18
3 M.A. Cirque Vegas Style	19
The Characters.....	19
The Archetypes.....	20
The Ringmaster	21
The Innocent Child.....	22
The Evil Emperor	24
Creating the language of the fights.....	26
4 The Aftermath	29
Auditions	30
Rehearsals.....	33
Script Summary.....	34
Was this production successful	36
What would I change.....	37
Conclusion	39
Revelations	41
Bibliography	49
Appendices	
(A) M.A. Cirque Script	51
(B) The Battle at Mt. Olympus Script.....	61
(C) Summary of Ritual Poetic Drama.....	70
(D) Transcript of Releasing Ki	72
Vita.....	74

Abstract

WELCOME TO THE CIRCUS: FINDING WAYS TO ARTISTICALLY EXPRESS THE MARTIAL WAY

A study of the merger of martial arts and theatre

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

By Donzell Parnell Lewis, MFA

Virginia Commonwealth University 2011

Major Director: Dr. Noreen Barnes, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre

This thesis explores various artistic and ritual practices of martial arts in relation to its presentation on stage. As a martial artist and actor I believe there are complementary practices in both crafts interdisciplinary of each other. For a martial artist, the individual's performance and execution of martial arts techniques can be enhanced through emotional availability and characterization. For the actor, the martial arts can help condition the body physically, mentally and emotionally to create a grounded presence of connectivity to the earth. However, sometimes the martial arts are viewed as a militaristic discipline and not as artistic expression. I believe that the martial arts can be both discipline and artistry. Over the past three years of my graduate studies I have explored different methods to merge these methodologies. This thesis examines a successful devised show conceived by students and myself at our martial arts studio (dojang), at Martial Arts World of Powhatan, in Powhatan Virginia.

This thesis' examination describes and evaluates the production we titled *M.A. Cirque: the Evolution* (Martial Arts Circus: an evolution of martial arts). The *M.A. Cirque* is a theatrical martial arts performance expanded out of a ten minute competition routine to become a thirty minute production performed in Las Vegas, Nevada. Secondly, an exploration for further

analysis of a supplemental martial arts demonstration titled *Battle at Olympus: A new martial arts super show*, describes the revisit of the theatrical process that was developed when devising the *M.A. Cirque*.

Introduction

Directing for the theatre

As a young artist, I practice many ways to tell stories and create art. One of the most challenging venues I sometimes use to create art is the craft of directing. I respect the art of directing and value of the director's position within the artistic community. Without directors, the actors, musicians, singers and dancers would have no sounding board to experiment their creative decisions on. Over the past three years of graduate school studies I have spent a portion of my studies practicing the art of directing. Accordingly, I find the joy of directing to be timeless each time I witness the process of a story's creation reach its realization on an opening night. The following essay will describe the successes and failures I have learned throughout my educational directing career at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The beginning:

I never intended on becoming a director. However, since childhood I have always loved theatre and sharing stories. I discovered I possessed a talent to tell stories, but I never felt I had the prowess to help shape another artist's story into actualization. The time I initially fell in love with directing is when I took my first undergraduate course in the fundamentals of directing in my junior year of college. At this time I had become a bored frustrated performer. During junior year of college, I was overwhelmed with the confusion of not seeing enough accurate representation of my cultural heritage on the stage. Thus, I decided to become a director in hopes that I could have more control over the types of stories I helped to tell. I realized the toughness of the job and began to develop a deep respect the role of director. Soon my favorite aspect of directing became the artistic exchange I found between the director and the actor. I

became enamored with the cherished bond that can be developed between a director and a cast when they share their love for creating theatre with each other.

The first play I directed was *Herbert, Look!*, a One Act written by deceased author Phillip Blackwell suggested to me by professor Dr. Noreen Barnes. This play was the perfect production to experiment with. The story raises questions about the validity of the dominant American culture's perspective of race/racism and their imposed gaze of the African-American homosexual. When I read the play I interpreted it to contain moments of camp, bits of realism and most importantly for me, political activism. The script is brilliantly written which accounts for a large portion of the success of my direction. With a great script and great cast, I believe it is hard for any director to aesthetically ruin a play. I lucked out on my first directing encounter acquiring great script and a talented two person cast. After the completion of the class project, I was afforded a well-earned 'A' by the class professor. The lessons learned and moments shared from this process is what encouraged me to continue directing. I did not continue to direct because it was something fun to do. I continued to direct because I discovered I loved the process.

After gaining the respect and love for directing that I still hold fast to today, I enrolled in the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) graduate school of theatre program. My first semester of graduate school I petitioned, and was granted permission to direct *The Laramie Project* written by Moises Kaufman and Members of the Tectonic Theatre Company. This full length play is when I officially started to develop my personal aesthetic as a director. Since those directing endeavors I have learned to embrace several values that shape my personal approach to directing. The first being the director's initial encounter with 'Risk'.

Risk:

Risk is probably the most valuable tool I have learned to embrace as director. When taking risks it shows courage and care for the project you choose to undertake. However, taking risks was probably the most challenging lesson for me to learn throughout my graduate studies. In fact, I admit that risk taking is still an artistic demon I continue to battle with periodically as both an actor and a director. Thus, without the right amount of risk justice cannot be served to the text. Anne Bogart states in her book, *A Director Prepares, seven essays on Art and Theatre*, that “without embracing risk, there can be no progress and no adventure” (48). This adventure that Bogart alludes to I believe encapsulates the very essence of the process of theatre making. Each performance, each song, each dance, each monologue is a journey full of adventure where the artist risks encountering successes and failures repeatedly. This journey is where the artist encounters the creative unknown. From my perspective the director must take a similar journey. If I risk in the creation process then in result I will recognize and empathize with the cast when my actors risk.

Further examining the value of risk, I am attracted to work that challenges the status quo. Collectively many of my predecessors are pioneers that built their careers on challenging the institution of systemic racism in America. The memories of their struggles are part of my cultural upbringing. It is important to recognize the memory that resides within my psyche because it essentially has shaped me into the artist I am today. In regards to memory and its relation to the theatre making process Bogart states that “The act of memory is a physical act and lies at the heart of the art of theatre. If theatre were a verb, it would be ‘to remember’”(22). In support of Bogart’s theory, I make the hypothesis that as a director I either consciously or subconsciously draw knowledge and inspiration from the collective memories of/about my

ancestry. It is important to note that through the hard work of those that have come before me; I remember their struggle and now claim parts of this iconic struggle as my own.

Directorially, a main objective I seek is finding ways to encourage audiences to remember the existence of the diaspora of various marginalized populations in this world.

But what does directing have to do with directing? This is a question I have asked myself [and others] many times before. In her book Bogart continues to explain that “Memory plays a huge role in the artistic process. Every time you stage a play, you are embodying a memory. Human beings are stimulated to tell stories from the experience of remembering an incident or a person” (28). Personally, I agree with Bogart. The main reason I became a director is because I felt that the stories relatable to my cultural history were not being told. I had no memory of who, what, or how I became the person I am today. Understand that in making this claim I am not stating that there is no theatrical material available for my cultural digestion. In actuality, the exact opposite is true. There are many plays, monologues, and scenes accessible to a young black male. However, at this time in my community this dramatic literature was minimally produced and my theatre classes essentially taught a small collection of plays exploring the experience of/about the African/African-American diaspora. Thus, since I knew material was available for me and others similar to me, I decided to become a director in hopes that I could actively choose more stories about the cultural memory of this powerful ancestry for presentation it’s the stage. Working with my actors over these past three years has taught me that sometimes as a director I have to take the biggest risk. The risk I must take is making decisions.

Trust and Decision

I believe that a director must find ways to enable the trust of a cast. This challenge to me of enabling the trust of a cast is a potential risky responsibility. As the director, actors trust me

to be a sounding board for their decisions. When actors make a decision, they look for me to validate or investigate their decision. My validation or challenge of an actor's decision is very integral to the process of art making. Making a decision equates taking a risk. Making a choice to cast an actor entails risking that actor has the confidence to play the role. Making a choice to insert a blackout in between scenes is to postulate the audience will remain engaged with the action of the play. Bogart describes decision making as a violent act, stating " Art is violent. To be decisive is violent...only when something has been decided can the work really begin. The decisiveness, the cruelty, which has extinguished the spontaneity of the moment, demands that the actor begin an extraordinary work: to resurrect the dead" (45). In this passage Bogart reinforces the idea that to make a decision implies that the actor and/or the director kill the continuation of discovery. Thus it is essentially acceptable to excogitate that if in the decision making process the actor is creating a violent act, the director accordingly must do the same. As a director the cast and I are working towards accomplishing the same goal. We want to tell a story. Through the telling a story, questions can be raised, truths can be revealed and universality may be recognized. As the director, my grasp of risk, trust and decision making require me to be an active part of the creation process.

As I bring this section of my thesis to a close it is important to understand that I am an artist capable to be a director, actor, dramaturge, and/or a martial artist. I am living being with many talents and many forms of expression, hence I use my various creative instruments to create art and tell stories based on an investigation of my ancestral memory. This thesis singularly describes, in narrative form, the exploration of a personal journey directing young students as part of my martial arts ancestry and my theatrical legacy. Throughout these readings you will gain insight into my mind as a director, writer, choreographer and martial arts teacher.

The heart of this thesis details a three year risk that I took--a risk in theatre, a risk in martial arts and the risk in sharing a process of personal significance with the world. Without risk nothing would be gained, but all could be lost.

Personal Affirmation

This thesis is a narrative description of a personal exploration of the crafts of theatre (performance) and martial arts (movement). I will detail accounts of personal, professional and pedagogical growth in support of a method that I have been able to practice within my own artistic career. With that being stated, I do not attempt to claim that all of the concepts, methodologies and discoveries mentioned belong to my creative ingenuity. In fact majority of my work stems from the dissemination of a lengthy study of theatre through the *Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum (RPDWAC)* system and my Martial Arts World martial arts training. Accordingly, I want to state that I have trained in RPDWAC for six years. I have trained Tae Kwon Do for over fifteen years. It is indubitable that majority of my knowledge stems from lessons learned through the practical application of these crafts within the studio and professional world. I have learned most of these principles through a traditional apprenticeship method of education. Thus, I will not attempt to locate the exact moment, day, lesson or time that I learned some of these principles. However, I will cite, quote and annotate specific statements, philosophies and lessons researched that reinforce what I have learned in the classroom and martial arts studio. A lot of the works consulted in this thesis continue to reaffirm the existence of the work that I teach each day in my martial arts studio or theatre rehearsal. It is my hopes that the reader will learn about the effectiveness of my approach to theatre and martial arts through the results of personal trial and failure experiments.

My martial arts philosophy

As a young child growing up in the martial arts I learned early the importance of personal discipline. Each day I was able to attend practice, I would rush to the studio, bow onto the mats and sit with patient expectation for my class to begin. At the time I began training I was unsure why I enjoyed martial arts, but I knew the studio was a place that I belonged to. I would watch my Master Instructor teach classes with a gifted ability touch each student. The kindness in his voice, the speed of his moves, the power of his kicks, and the humbleness of his spirit united our student body of various ages, races, personalities and genders. It was at age eleven when I took my first martial arts class. I have now continued to train for fifteen years. At the time of my childhood I was unaware of the power of martial arts. I knew it was considered cool amongst kids my age. I watched a lot of martial arts movies and adored popular stars such as Michelle Yeoh, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. However, I was not confident in the myth that martial arts can strengthen an individuals mind, body and soul. All I knew was that it was fun and after each class I felt like I had achieved something of personal feat.

Throughout my various experiences in the martial arts I have to come to acknowledge that training in the martial arts does empower an individual because it is a way of life. The Martial Arts are timeless. It is a way of living that is built from the world's ancestral pool of physical conditioning, mental tenacity and spiritual enlightenment. As a martial artist and a martial arts instructor I believe true martial artists understand the power of their training is about the longevity of their life.

Unfortunately, as a teacher in today's modern society it is challenging to teach this concept to emerging students. I fear the sacredness of the Martial Arts lifestyle is on a declining spiral. I see a large faction of students concerned with the tangibility of the product of their

training and not the strength of the process of their training. This product of training I speak of is the materialization of the symbolic martial arts belt. The system of using colored belts to notate a student's progress was enacted to act as a monitor of how far the student has come and how far the student has to continue to progress. However, throughout my years of teachings I continue to observe students mentally focusing on the value of their belt and not the value of the struggles of the training it took to get that belt. This is a dilution of the martial arts legacy. My mind is boggled when I witness a student tell the martial arts instructor why they are ready to advance to the next belt level. I wonder how those students can justify their minimal months or years of training to an instructor's years of digestion of the craft. They cannot. Recently, I have unfortunately developed the belief that everyone wearing a martial arts belt does not carry the living ancestry of the martial way.

As a teacher, student, and practitioner of martial arts, I am in search of an affiliation with a true martial artist. Thus as a disciple of the martial arts I am interested in a reclamation of the principles of the historic legacy of martial arts training. When I teach martial arts classes it is to help students access the hidden abilities of their internal power. My objective is to help build the self-actualized martial artist through pedagogical exchange between students. I challenge students to avoid focusing on what their rank is, or when their next belt advancement test will be and focus on the quality of self-actualization, that is achieved when the student recognizes the harmonic spirit of the martial arts.

My Master Instructor has taught me the Martial Arts are a natural system of edification for the individual. The martial arts are not synthetic and accordingly the martial arts do not seek to fabricate any human experiences. The martial arts exist universally as a personal axiom for the practitioner. According to the principles and lessons of my Grandmaster, The martial arts are

an action philosophy based on nature. Nature is about harmony and truth. Without action nothing happens. We cannot control how individuals commune with nature. Consequently, I cannot control how individuals commune with the martial arts. Therefore, I believe that since the martial arts is an action philosophy based on nature, I must continually find ways to process the martial arts that naturally resound from within me.

Consequently, I am an artist and I use the vivacity of the martial arts interchangeably with the theatrical craft. As an actor, the martial arts help to keep my body physically strong, mentally sound, and my spirit emotionally aware. The martial arts have given me a wide array of unique movements available at my disposal when called upon.

Philosophy of Teaching

I believe the classroom and the theatre are a sacred space. It is a safe space where walls are torn down, failure is met, success is achieved, trust is built, friendships are made and learning is embraced. In essence the classroom and the theatre are one in the same—they are a community. As an educator it is my job to facilitate individualism, and environmental segregation into a strong community where each participant is allowed to “go and be satisfied,” with their creative process.

A strong community builds each participant up to their fullest ability. A strong community protects its members and its creative process. Each member has a job/role in the community that allows the member to be an active part of the process. As an educator I choose to teach in a classroom that is a community. This is done through the principles and guidelines of *Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum* as developed by Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates. Through the ritual process each student will be invited into the community and held to an expectation to nurture the community. Ritual exercises include the history and practice of the African art of storytelling, incorporating movement, voice and textual practices of the craft that encourages the student to give mentally, emotionally and spiritually to their art. Once the community is established, free learning can be embraced.

I strive to guide the student actor through their dreams and onto embracing their creative spirit, shaping them into the theatrical artist they are destined to be. This is done through team learning and group sharing. Students are spilt into groups/families that are responsible for sharing with the community. In my classroom I am not the sole educator, it is a shared process within the collective of the student body. I do not wish to shape students that simply regurgitate information; I want students to challenge their education, allowing them to digest their

knowledge. Students are given assignments, texts, and exercises to help teach the class through discussion and exploration. By allowing the student to take more of an active and aggressive part of their education it encourages them to “cover the ground they stand on” accepting their failures and successes. Each student is charged with the responsibility of owning their education and their craft.

At times of presentations groups will present together and they will have time to present individually. When a student presents individually the community will listen, share and discuss with that student their success and their failure. The community continues to help each other because of the trust and respect they develop with each other through the devotion of the study of theatre.

In my classroom the student will be challenged each day. Education is free and it must be taken by the student I will not hand education to anyone; they will fight to have it. This will help shape them into self-actualized artists and human beings.

Chapter One: The Genesis

The completion of this thesis explores the three year cumulative study an artistic journey with my experiences within the practices of theatre and martial arts. Fundamentally, I explore the personal benefits I have experienced from both methodologies as an actor, teacher, director and choreographer. Thus, this work explains a sharing and dissemination of my process for using martial arts and the acting methodology of *Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum (RPDWAC)*. To understand this form of artistic expression and interpretation, I shall share a summary of my artistic career.

My journey began when I was in the seventh grade. I first joined the middle school drama club and subsequently enrolled in a local Richmond, VA martial arts school, where I continued to train theatre and martial arts throughout my high school and college career. However, I did not ever practice both crafts at the same time. After enrolling in Virginia Commonwealth University and completing the first year freshman acting course, during my tenure as a sophomore I began to struggle to understand acting. I started to receive failing grades accompanied by frustrated comments from my undergraduate professors. However, despite the unfavorable comments I received, as the semester continued, I searched for as many acting opportunities I could book.

I soon landed a role in a devised play titled *uncle tom: Deconstructed*, directed by fellow student, mentor and friend Olisa Enrico-Johnson. It is during this process that I was introduced to studying *Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum (RPDWAC)*, an acting methodology designed from the creative mind of my theatre mentor Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates (Dr. T). The play *uncle tom: Deconstructed* was created out of the RPDWAC methodology ten

years ago by Dr. Pettiford-Wates and a group of college students in Seattle, Washington. It was Enrico- Johnson who first instructed me of the basics of this new methodology for actor training. Instantly I took to the process like a “fish to water”. RPDWAC is a holistic methodology that encourages the harmony and balance of the body (movement), mind (text), and spirit (emotion). An explanation of the RPDWAC method is provided in the Appendix section. As I continued to study this method I realized this concept of merging the mind, body, and spirit of an artist directly correlated with my martial arts training.

Within a martial arts training system the student works on learning how to master functionality over their instrument (the individual) through disciplining their physical, mental, and moral prowess. Due to this parallel in methodologies, it is clear why I was attracted to the discipline and ritual practices of RPDWAC. In hindsight I recognize that my life has been centered on ritualized practices. Let me explain. Due to my grandparents mentorship I grew up a member of the Pentecostal church organization The Church of God in Christ since five years old. Additionally, I have trained in the Korean system of Taekwondo since age eleven. Both the church and the dojang emphasize daily rituals for self-improvement and sustainability. Ergo, due to the nature of my childhood influences, I adjusted to the ritualized approach of RPDWAC very comfortably. After finding much personal success and theatrical growth within this methodology, I came to desire a deeper knowledge of RPWAC. After having separate conversations with Dr. T, and Dr. Noreen Barnes (chairman of VCU graduate theatre studies), I was supported in my decision to enter the VCU graduate theatre pedagogy program. In 2007 I graduated with my BFA in Performance that fall and enrolled in the graduate MFA program January 2008. However, when I entered graduate school, I had no idea what thesis path to study. At the time I had two main interests; one in Queer theatre and the other in Ritual theatre. I value

both genres equally and neither takes precedence in my life. It wasn't until one day in rehearsals for a newly devised ritual play titled *The P.I.C.: Prison Industrial Complex*, that Dr. T suggested I find a way to combine both my martial arts practices and my current graduate school studies. Dr. T reminded me that I had been training in both for a long time therefore it made sense to combine the two into one educational journey. Initially, I resisted her suggestion because I believed the two were separate art forms and were not meant to be merged. At this time, my lack of knowledge in the history of oriental theatre such as The Peking Opera, Japanese Kabuki theatre, or No theatre misled me to believe that the martial arts weren't used on the theatrical stage. As time went on, through my research and practical experiments I proved myself wrong and have only found that if theatre and martial arts are applied correctly they will fuel and empower one another. Concurrently as this emerging concept of mixing theatre and martial arts was being encouraged at school, a similar experience was taking place at the dojang where I taught martial arts since I was fifteen years old. Since that age I have coached, instructed and choreographed our dojang's demonstration team. The demonstration team's job is to primarily act as the representative image of our dojang. The demonstration team performs movement based artistic expressions of the martial arts accompanied by music. After year of performing, I recognized boredom in my students with the traditional martial arts demonstration format. This traditional format consists of highlighting superior martial arts skill and techniques in a very cut and paste presentation format. The demonstrations are usually void of characters, transitions, environment, storyline etc. Demonstrations may be human performance but it is not story. At our dojang the students wanted more than the industry standard. To alleviate this boredom I decided to get risky and create our first theatrical infused martial arts demonstration titled *Diamonds*. *Diamonds* was created during our annual competition season and it was the first time

I decided I would experiment with mixing theatre and martial arts. I put a few children in simple costumes and created a basic story line designed to fit within a ten minute time restraint. The story was simple. It is about a young girl in search of the best man to help her fulfill her dream of possessing a superior diamond jewel. During this martial arts routine, boys approach her one lined up to impress her with their martial arts skills and a material possession. Unfortunately nothing impresses her. She refuses the gifts of candy, bears, and flowers which results in her upsetting the boys and this motivates them to attack her. She in return uses her martial arts skills to defend herself from multiple opponents and defeats each boy. Finally, the perfect gentleman six years old at the time, comes out, impresses her with his martial arts and presents her with a large diamond jewel. Because of the theatricality of the martial arts demonstration we won the tournament that day and have continued to win seven more competitions in a row. My students were empowered, energized, and ready for another demonstration with theatrical elements. Due to the overwhelming desire to perform my thesis process officially began; I started the quest to combine theater and martial arts within the martial arts studio.

The Martial Structure: Foundational Rituals

Currently I've trained in the martial arts for fifteen years and have achieved the rank of 4th degree senior instructor black belt. My approach to using martial arts in devised theatre is a lengthy process. Professionally I am not a fan of various survey style classes of martial arts training. I don't believe that a student can receive the full benefits of martial arts in one weekend, month or in one semester. The effectiveness of my process consists of studying both performance and martial arts concurrently in order to physically empower a person with the physical awareness of a true harmony of self and nature. This harmony can only be achieved through the long term investment in the study of the martial arts and the theatre. In this chapter I

will first breakdown the ritual practices of the martial arts and their importance to the perspective artist. Without daily rituals in a martial arts studio the community will not survive. As an instructor, one of my top priorities is to instill recognition of the sacred reverence of the dojang. This recognition for the martial arts studio can also be applied to the acting studio.

Alongside giving my students a dual focus of martial arts and theatre rituals, a primary daily ritual is that upon each practice they must enter the dojang with respect for this sacred space for training by execution formal bows. Upon entering the dojang students must bow at the doorstep of the building. This initial bow sparks a mental recognition that they are entering the martial arts studio to complete an educational task. Through bowing students are encouraged to become a vessel for the martial arts. Next students bow three times to walk onto the mat symbolizing the cleansing of the space recognizing the United States (current homeland), Korea (homeland of Tae Kwon Do) and the other students or instructors present. At the beginning of class, the students line up in descending rank order of highest to lowest, formally bow to the instructor, meditate for reflection, and then the instructor or senior ranked student physically warms up the class. This system of repeating bows helps students to clear their minds and continually give themselves over to the focus of the lesson. This can be labeled the ritual of “emptying”; which is where the students empty their minds, bodies and spirits as a community in preparation for a rigorous exploration of the craft. It is not until after this process that the students are ready for the class. I teach that this system to start practices must never change because together we all create a safe space for our training.

With this system in place, age is not paramount but experience and knowledge are. Our dojang’s system of rituals is very traditional to that of ancestral martial arts troupes. In relation to the theatre, this system of discipleship can best be related to a similarity of the No Theatre’s

tradition for members learning and training with one specific acting house for their careers. Most martial arts students maintain a similar structure for learning and training their craft with years upon years of training at the same studio. Therefore students of any age are able to disseminate the school's history, culture, rules and regulations to newly accepted team members. Even on days when I am unavailable to start training my students are able to start class themselves. My most experienced children regardless of their age are capable of facilitating the cleansing ritual of class. Again in relation to the history of No Theatre, Tadashi Suzuki in his book *The Way of Acting* acknowledges the respect for the wisdom young No actors carry within their performance troupes. Suzuki states that:

The level of deliberately created communality has no reason to depend, then on the distinctions between youth and age, adults and children. To put it another way, in this system children are conceived of only as small adults. The essence of the matter lies in the creation of a communal sense of what individuals have lived through, what has come to be called "experience." What is at stake is the depth of that experience. It is not a question of merely dividing humans by a quantitative standard of chronology, of age. In terms of performance, the piling up of years does not automatically convey artistic adulthood; only the depth of experience through which the actor has lived in the troupe is of value. (51/52)

Therefore through this training system my youngest (six years old) has facilitated this process just as effectively as my oldest (eighteen years old). It is easy for the students do so because the ritual never changes.

Accordingly since there is a beginning class ritual, there is also an ending ritual. Closing is important because without a proper close the students do not leave this sacred space effectively. The closing ritual can be labeled a "sealing" ritual, which is similar to the cleansing ritual but shorter. To first close class the students sit down and meditate on the progress made in their class. After meditation the students then bow out three times: bowing to the displayed flags (respecting the ancestral roots of martial arts), second they bow to the highest ranking student (respecting their assistance) and lastly they bow to the instructor (respecting them for their

knowledge). These two rituals provide me as the instructor with a progressive classroom environment gaining students full attention in each lesson. Coincidentally, my system of bowing in and bowing out directly correlates to the RPDWAC methodology of maintaining an ensemble opening and closing the rehearsal. The bowing system in my dojang is the first recognition of the possible merger of a theatrical process for the martial arts classroom. Throughout this thesis I will continue to describe in more detail the various rituals of the martial arts and the rituals of RPDWAC that were applied to my class over the past three years.

Chapter Two: The ‘Martial’ with the ‘Arts’

The main analysis for my thesis is a narrative explanation an artistic journey of combining theatre into my martial arts classroom which resulted in a devised production titled *M.A. Cirque: The Evolution*. This martial arts performance was first showcased at the 2009 Martial Arts World national competition tournament. *The M.A. Cirque* received many accolades from judges, and martial arts professionals which in turn gained our team an invitation to perform at the international Martial Arts Leader’s summit in Las Vegas, Nevada, November 2009 at the Rio Hotel and Casino. This chapter will describe the creation, auditions and devising process of this production, and later I will discuss the remount and rewritten version of this martial arts show.

As I previous stated, *The M.A. Cirque* was originally a ten minute movement piece performed for competition at the 2009 national Martial Arts World tournament. The inspiration of the piece was taken from Cirque Du Soliel’s current production of *KA*. I cannot remember my initial encounter with *KA*, but remember watching tons of clips of the show on YouTube. I was surprised to see a completely martial arts infused spectacle of grand design. This is when I was inspired to create what I call a “martial arts super show” to be used by my students on the tournament circuit. The production of *M.A. Cirque* is different from the production of *KA*, but I think it is important to recognize that *KA* was a major catalyst for the inspiration my thesis project. I explained to my students that we were going to maximize our efforts to blend performance, martial arts and competition by bringing non-traditional western theatre to a non-traditional theatre stage. After announcing our new focus for training, I began pre-production research to prepare for the approaching training season with my students. Naturally since I was the instructor of a martial arts school and not the director at a theater I had no technical theater

staff available to help with creation. However, I did have a large group of willing parents I could depend upon. I decided to call some of the parents to a meeting in order to find out what each parent's strengths were. I then organized some fathers on the stage /set construction crew, mothers on the costume crew, and other parents on the stage management crew. In essence we became representative of a small theatre company built from within our martial arts school. After building the production team, it was time to devise the new martial arts show using my students as actors and my parents as the technical crew.

Step 1: Story Creation

The story of the *M.A. Cirque* is a simple but for the detailed script please consult the appendices section of this thesis. *M.A. Cirque* tells the story of a traveling martial arts circus. I selected a circus as the theme because of its universality. I believe mostly anyone can relate to a circus and it allows for actors to play non-realistic characters. I also liked this idea because at the time of creation I had twenty kids and directorially I desired for them all to do something highlighting their individualism and talents. Since the circus highlights human performance and not realism, this could be accomplished because anything entertaining can happen at a circus. After settling on the idea of a traveling martial arts circus troupe, essentially the rest of the story came easy. It is important to note that the circus troupe had to be labeled a martial arts circus because I had to satisfy industry standards set for demo teams at martial arts tournaments. The story of *M.A. Cirque* explores the life of traveling circus performers living in peace and harmony. One day a disruption of their societal peace is caused by an evil group of circus performers in conquest to conquer them. A major battle ensues between good and evil in an attempt to resist the emerging dark power. Due to this conflict, their world spirals into a chaotic society whose only hope for salvation resides in the faith of the innocent child; the only human

character of the show. It is only his love for magic that can facilitate peace between the two warring communities. Aesthetically, at the top of the show the mood is light, happy and fun accompanied by light non-aggressive martial arts techniques. During the story creation I use the entrance of the evil emperor to change the show's atmosphere to a darker overtone enhanced by advanced martial arts skills. As the climax builds, the mood changes show to include suspense, as two young heroes from the good traveling circus declare war against the Evil Emperor. The Emperor and his followers are defeated, peace is brought amongst the two warring circus communities and I end the show with celebratory martial arts forms that seals the treaty of the peace between the two groups. After the story was created, I no longer had a martial arts demonstration; I had a martial arts drama. The next segment of this chapter explains the process of auditions and casting calls for the students.

Step 2 - Auditions: I hope 'they' get it...

After completing the storyboard for the show, I was ready to start rehearsals. My first experiment in this process was holding auditions on January 11th, 2009. Auditioning for roles was a new concept for my students. Usually for our demonstrations they show up to practices and are given parts in a routine. However this time was different. This time I wanted to create a work of art---a piece of theatre. Thus, I needed to hold auditions to search for the right person to play the right character. During auditions I maintained the structure of traditional martial arts practices; we performed the bow in process, warmed up our bodies as an ensemble, sat down and talked about the next level of our training. Then audition process began. Students were put through a rigorous two day audition and call back process which included martial arts tests, body center movement exercises, and martial arts choreography. Each student was graded on the proficiency and potential of execution for each stage of the audition. At this point I no longer

talked about the students as a team; instead they were an ensemble cast. Naturally the martial arts portion of the audition was easy for the students. But then I had to take the challenges to the next level. For stage two of auditions the students had to explore body center exercises and Characterization. Although the students had very little theatre experience, I had the students explore character creation at the audition to set an expectation of embracing the creative unknown. I gave them four body centers to explore: the head, chest, feet and knees as part of an archetypal character to embody. They were instructed to move across the room in that body center. Most of them did not know what this meant, but they had fun attempting to show me what they thought a person looks like with an enhanced body center in their chest. The archetypes they were given to play with were the warrior, the villain, the hero, and for fun an ape. Each stage of the audition I witnessed the student's lower their walls of fear or embarrassment, and by the end of auditions everyone was a powerful funny ape "monkey-ing" around the room!

Stage 3 of auditions consisted of grouping the students for choreography. This stage of auditions was run similar to a dance calls at musical auditions. I tested the performers group by group to evaluate their rhythmic proficiency. My choreography for martial arts forms is very musical and rhythmic, with a unique style of combining dance and martial arts together. The martial arts forms are essential to the artistic display of martial arts. A good martial arts form should guise the abrasiveness of martial arts techniques and look similar to a dance while simultaneously displaying the students technical martial arts ability. My style of form does this plus more. Accordingly, I blend together dance, gymnastics, martial arts, and emotional recall. My synthesis of martial arts choreography is very representative of the historic Peking opera. There is no doubt that my artistic perspective with martial arts is influenced by my encounter

with the western world's dissemination of oriental theatre practices such as Kabuki, No theatre, or the Peking opera. In the article "Peking Opera and Grotowski's Concept of 'Poor Theater'", author Yao-kun Liu, states that when performing Peking opera:

"All the singing, dancing, gesture, mime and body movement on stage must be consistent with the rhythm of music. Meanwhile, the rhythm in singing and speaking is also counterbalanced by the rhythm in gestures, mimes and body movements." (5)

Being that I have never directly been afforded the opportunity to study oriental theatre, my research of its practices stem from text books, articles and journals on the art form. Yao-kun Liu's description of the harmonic balance of the different artistic expressions used in Peking Opera helped reinforce my belief that it is possible to synthesize various forms of performance. In auditions, two hours after evaluation it was evident that students were virtually in shock and exhausted but excited to be cast in the show. Professionally, I had never witnessed this excitement in my students before. The following week, I cast the show and sent out the rehearsal schedule. This next section of this chapter will not detail day to day interactions at rehearsals but will discuss my pedagogical approach of finding a balance in teaching martial arts, coaching acting, and directing the devising of the *M.A. Cirque*.

Step 3 - Rehearsal format: a balancing act

Rehearsals had to consist of a combination of acting, physical conditioning, martial arts techniques and repetition of the routine for our competition. This was a challenging process when thinking about the little bit of time we had from January to April to devise a show with a group of children with very little theatre background. Our rehearsals were three days a week Friday – Sunday for 2 hours each practice. In rehearsals the athletic conditioning was not new for my students; however understanding body centers, gestural movement and the theatrical energy required to sustain the life of a character was new to them. I insisted to my students that

we should not think of this preparation as a means to a martial arts tournament but instead it was for a performance. Therefore, each character was required to be larger than life. I informed them that nothing would be “too big” and they should make large choices about their characters. This was one of my most effective tactics to inspire the students to explore the use of non-realism in archetypical characters. During rehearsal to strengthen these muscles needed for performance I led them through basic RPWAC and Viewpointing exercises. When implementing the viewpoints movements exercises I found the students easily took to the techniques. As training continued, I witnessed a revelatory recognition of students exuding more confidence and pride in their characters. Naturally students started to make choices on their own, just like a trained actor. I observed rehearsals morph into a collaborative process where students were asking if they could: ‘enter from up center’, ‘have a cape for their character’, or ‘scream during a certain point in the show?’ I loved all of those questions and invited more from the students.

One day after rehearsal, one boy cornered me to talk about his character’s back story. He had voluntarily created a back story for his character; a task I never instructed any of the students to do. In fact, I honestly felt that creating a back-story would be too much to handle for the children. This kid proved me wrong. In the show, out of the various character roles of townsmen, minions, clowns, warrior twins, and the evil court; I cast this kid as a ‘townsmen’. The townsmen were transitional characters. This particular kid was a townsman for the good circus at the shows beginning, but to balance numbers during the final battle scene I then moved him to fight with the evil circus. I never gave this student a specific reason for this change instead I just told him to do it. He eventually came to me and shared with me why he thought his character changes sides during the show for the final war. He developed this elaborate back-story about his character that entailed a history of working for the good circus as a double agent.

His story made complete sense! He wanted to know if I approved of this back-story. I told him if his character's backstory inspired his best performance, then he should use it. Consequently, his performance did improve after the creation of his story. In rehearsals I noticed him making small character choices for his character based on his decision to "betray" his circus family. This student had developed investment for his character. No longer was he recreating the moves I taught him, but he was now making each move and moment for his character his own. I believe this change in the student's performance is similar to a concept Jerzy Grotowski describes in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*. In his book Grotowski states "We know that the text per se is not theatre, that it becomes theatre only through the actors' use of it – that is to say, thanks to intonations, to the association of sounds, to the musicality of the language" (21). Even though my students are not dealing with vocal text, they are using the body as text. They speak their characters truth through their interpretation of gestural movements and martial arts techniques. Thus, similarly to Grotowski's belief that the actor's use of the text is what makes it theatre, I too believe that the creation of movement alone is not what makes our show theatre; it is how my students emotionally express their movement. Small moments like this re-assured me that theatre is interdisciplinary and I had successfully brought theatre to my martial arts studio.

Step 4 - Ensemble building

My goal was to create a strong ensemble of martial artist while simultaneously shaping them into actors. The bulk of my professional experience is with devised theatre. It is a style of acting and directing that I am most comfortable with and directorially I like to start a process with ensemble building. To build my ensemble, the first challenge was finding a way to create group synergy. This was a challenge because uniqueness of the martial arts atmosphere encourages each student during class to physically train for themselves as opposed to working

together as a group. My main objective of creating group synergy at this phase of the devising process was to encourage individual progression through a shared responsibility. My theatrical tactics to accomplish a strong ensemble first began with training them to build group focus and spatial awareness through drum work. At the beginning of each class I circled the students up, and trained them to walk in sync as a team staying in step with the beat of the drum. The drum work took about three weeks to fully embrace in practice. It is important to acknowledge that I was training twenty students with various experiences from ages six to eighteen. However, despite the age difference I believed that everyone could learn to work as one unit in order to accomplish the task.

As an instructor I embrace various ages of students as an effective tool for pedagogical exchange. When using the span of ages as a teaching method in the classroom it is easy to set expectations for both the younger and older students. The younger students are expected to learn valuable qualities from older students such as focus, proper physical technique and repetitive practice. Additionally, the older students are required to set positive examples of work ethic and be readily available to help teach the younger students. Using this system of student leadership within our ensemble encouraged the older students to claim more ownership and significance in their own community. This system establishes an eldership amongst the ensemble. However, as mentioned earlier age did not always determine this eldership, sometimes eldership was based on experience. As drum work continued I found ways to merge the training system of our martial arts school. If students would lose focus, get frustrated or drop their energy during drumming, then I gave those students pushups, sit ups, or laps around the mat. These physical consequences were nothing excessive. In fact it is important to understand this physical system of discipline is normal to any traditional martial arts environment as it is not normal to the theatrical process.

Fundamentally, training my artists I was in a unique situation stuck between two worlds and two methodologies. The physical system of discipline; be it pushups, sit-ups, or laps around the mats is not a negative punishment but actually a ritualistic way to physically train an athlete. My students are athletes before they are performers, therefore using various exercises to physically train the mind and body into focus is not uncommon to them.

The second phase of drum work incorporated an exercise from the RPDWAC called Sculpted Movement. Sculpted Movement teaches students the importance of emotional location, sustainability of freeze frame poses, and spatial awareness of the stage. Additionally, the sculpted movement training teaches the artist the importance of listening to impulse. At this phase of our rehearsal process I needed to unlock the freedom of what it means to play and listen to impulse. Every good performer has to learn to trust their impulse and not block the creative process. I found the sculpted movement exercises to be challenging but an easier process for the children to grasp in comparison to the initiating drum work. In sculpted movement the facilitator (I) calls out recognizable words such as “power”, “war” or “love” to the group. The students then rush into the center of a circle and strike a pose which embodies the life of these words. No pose is wrong and no pose is right, they just “are”. The poses taken exist in the space and time of the rehearsal, not in relation to the play. Throughout rehearsals I deemed it important for the children grow as physical movers and learn how to embrace their bodies, gestural movement and impulse. Initially during the sculpted movement exercise the students looked at each other, laughed, and became resistant to this exercise. Already at their young ages they had developed a concept of what was “cool” and what was not. No student in the ensemble wanted to embarrass themselves through the sculpted movement exercise. I think this was a good reaction because the students needed to recognize this fear and get over it. As a director, it is my job to help

actors release their fear of approaching roles. In his book, *A Sense of Direction*, William Ball states that:

Fear is the primary enemy of creativity...when an actor approaches his role, it is always with some degree of fear. One of the jobs of the director is to encourage the actor to overcome his fear. Every director will find different techniques to supersede fear, but the most effective technique is for the director to assure the actor by what is said and done that they are allies; that the work will proceed on the basis of two people working toward a mutual goal. (44)

Recognizing this inhibition, I decided the best way to break the children of their fears was to praise them for every choice they made and encourage them to show me what else they could do. In the beginning no choice could be wrong because every choice was unique to the individual student. In *A Sense of Direction*, Ball states “A director understands that to an actor praise is like food. The actor cannot live without it, cannot flourish without it. A director must discipline himself to praise ceaselessly” (46). Based on Ball’s advice I was assured that if I could commend them on their choices they would gain self-confidence in the power of their performance. It was my job to help these children unlock their creative self-confidence. After repetitive practice and small success in the drum work and sculpted movement the students started to embrace the creative unknown. I believe that one of the beautiful things about working with children is that they adapt and adjust to different methodologies easier than adults do. After a while we were able to put the drum down and focus solely on the creation of our performance routine. I would only use the drum when I needed to strengthen ensemble teamwork. Accordingly, we continued on with rehearsals and devised a ten minute routine that was full of drama, martial arts and storytelling. Due to our overwhelming display of theatricality and excellent martial arts skill the student’s won first place. The extra bonus of winning first place this time was that two months after we returned home I got a phone call from the organizers of the Martial Arts Leader’s Summit; inviting my team to come perform the *M.A. Cirque* as the

headlining act of their annual conference being held in Las Vegas that upcoming November. The only caveat was the organizers wanted a thirty minute performance! Essentially we had to create a thirty minute ‘play’ out of a ten minute ‘scene’ originally developed for a martial arts competition. My students were used to creating simple, quick dramatic demonstrations in competition, but they had never created a long production similar to the length of a One-Act play. The performance event was to take place November 2009 which meant we had three and half months to create a thirty minute production with various age groups of children with little acting experience.

Step Five - Remounting the M.A. Cirque: ‘Vegas here we come!’

As I shifted focus towards the creation of the remount of the *M.A. Cirque*, I first reassembled my parent production team. I held production meetings and each team was given assignments and deadlines to have their portion of the production completed in order to revamp the *M.A. Cirque* in 3 ½ months. I was excited to see this creation take pilot at my small town martial arts dojang. Chapter four describes in detail the process of expanding the life of *M.A. Cirque*.

Chapter Three: M.A. Cirque Vegas Style

As the ensemble prepared to move into remounting the *M.A. Cirque*, we essentially only had ten minutes of original material; therefore again the first phase was to review the story creation. With a background in dramaturgy it helped me to mentally view the ten minute performance as a live movie “trailer” for a longer thirty minute production. The simplest way for me to extend the *M.A. Cirque* was to expand each cycle of the ten minute piece by at least three to five minutes of stage time. I separated our show into five cycles including a prologue and epilogue. I use cycles because the RPDWAC process uses an odd number of cycles in ritual creation process. The cycles broke down as: prologue, (1) it's a family affair, (2) Dark consumption, (3) the night belongs to the queen, (4) imperial struggles, (5) Armageddon, and Epilogue. The explanation of each cycle is provided in the appendix A of this thesis.

Characters and the story:

There are several characters that help to make The *M.A. Cirque* a unique show. However, for this thesis I will discuss the conception of three specific roles/students that were pivotal to the creation and the remounted production. The three roles are the Ringmaster (trickster), Innocent Child, and Evil Emperor (Lucifer). It is a commonly known that conflict is what creates drama and essentially the drama *The M.A. Cirque* is balanced on the shoulders of this triad of characters. Without these three characters, objective and conflict would not have existed in our performance. Working with three students involved a more hands on approach from me as the director. I had to carefully direct each student to have a specifically unique movement, personality, and characterization within the world of our play. Their archetypical characters needed to be instantly recognized by the audience. Our show is non-realistic and is built upon superstitions based out to the world of fantasy, myth, and magic. In the article, *Peking Opera:*

The Persistence of Tradition in the People's Republic of China, author Estelle M. Raben points out that based on the history of Peking Opera, "...Within each category, stock characters fulfill the audience's expectations as to appearance and behavior...all of this intense stylization of the Peking Opera, shared by the entire audience, constitutes a major portion of the dramatic experience" (57/58) This is another example of how I draw inspiration from the oriental styles of theatre with their stylization of movement and character. I desired to facilitate a similar sharing experience with my audience to that of the Peking Opera. My hypothesis at the time was that if each character had specific stylized movements and behaviors based on the imagery of their archetypes it would open the possibility that the audience could connect with these images, characters and gestures in their life.

The Archetypes:

It is important to understand that our production has archetypal characters and not stereotypical characters because of their potential relation to the audience. In the book *Acting and Singing with Archetypes* authors Janet B. Rodgers and Frankie Armstrong, make the distinction that "The stereotype restricts our imagination. The archetype expands our imagination. The stereotype is smaller than the individual. The archetype is larger." (xiv) Therefore, because an archetypal figure is more expansive than a stereotypical image, it was my belief that the *M.A. Cirque* characters would appeal more universally to various audiences. Our uses of archetypes were figures that all cultures could relate to because the archetype is the essence of a spirit not the face of person. Rodgers further explains that,

Archetypes are figures and creatures that inhabit the pools of the world's mythology, folk tales, epics, and ballads. There is a great similarity between these figures and creatures across the cultures that have never had contact with one another. Thus archetypes are universal essences that we all recognize..." (xii).

It was important for me to find as many ways to break the audience's perceptions of witnessing a traditional martial arts routine or a traditional play. The *M.A. Cirque* is neither. It is a synthetically crafted performance designed to connect universal elements found in all individuals by using various essences of theatre, dance, drama, song, and spirit. The embodiment and characterization of archetypes was going to be the main tactic universally speak to our audience. Therefore, as a director I spent many hours specifically shaping the archetypical movements, and sounds of the student performers. They had to find a way to relate to the archetype and then transfer the archetypes energy through the presentation of their martial arts movement. The following section examines how I worked with three principal students to build their archetypical characters.

The Ringmaster (The Trickster):

The ringmaster role is probably one of the characters closest to my heart for various reasons. She was the first character developed in the story creation. Originally, I had two ringmasters, and eventually the role was reduced down to one. It was important to conceive a ringmaster for many reasons and the main reason was that I needed a character to begin and end the show. The Ringmaster lives in dual worlds of the real world and the fantasy world of the circus. With this fluidity the ringmaster is able to enter and exit the world of the innocent child and is the most knowledgeable character created. I wanted a ringmaster to be able to communicate with the circus performers, innocent child, and the audience. Upon casting the Ringmaster I told her that I wanted her ringmaster to be larger than life and non-realistic. Aesthetically the Ringmaster was to possess the presentational qualities of a vaudevillian theatre artist. Together we worked on energy, bright eyes, keeping open hands with palms up and out etc. She quickly started to grasp the concept of a vaudevillian theatre artist and applied it to her

work. This was just one half of the physical properties I required for this role. Secondly, I designed for the ringmaster to move with a rhythm blending martial arts and lyrical dance. I chose this movement quality for the ringmaster because no other character would move with these synthesized elements. This specific movement quality needed to separate the ringmaster apart from others because she is a transitional character. When I use the word transitional, I interpret that to mean she is a character that is able to transition between the two worlds of fantasy land and real world easily. The Ringmaster always needed to be recognizable; as an omnipresent being. Consequently, there was more room for play with the elemental qualities of the ringmaster. A lot of the movements executed by the Ringmaster are not traditional martial arts moves; these moves take root in the martial arts and they are then adjusted by the aesthetics of dance. This Characterization of movement added a playful element of performance to the character's devising process. Overtime the Ringmaster and I spent a lot of hours outside of rehearsal; more so than any other student because I could push this student to reach deeper levels of emotional expression through her movement.

The Innocent Child:

The next character developed in the story creation was the Innocent Child. The innocent child operates as an oracle-like character. This character does not belong to either circus; in fact he is not part of the same world as the circus land. The innocent child lives in today's world. He is human, while the other characters are fantastical. His and the other children's belief in a world of magic is what fuel the life of the circus land. It is the innocence, truth, and light within the innocent child that makes him special to the circus world. He is the protagonist of the show. The good circus wants to help him flourish and continue to believe in fantasy while the evil circus wants to kidnap him and capture his innocence to spread their darkness throughout the

human world. With the creation of the innocent child both sides had a reason to either protect him or capture him which raised the stakes for both sides to fight for something.

Working with the student who played the innocent child was a true challenge. Since he was at the time the youngest student on my team, his creativity was limitless but he was also very shy. This student never wanted to do anything ‘wrong’, not because he was afraid to embarrass himself but because he wanted to be ‘right’ in order to please me as his director/teacher. I felt that his fear of disappointing me was easy to fix. My main tactic with releasing this kid’s fears was to simply explain to him that all I wanted him to do on the stage was to ‘play’. This meant he did not need to worry because we were playing a game on the stage and we make the rules.

As Antonin Artaud states in his book *The Theatre and its Double*, “Art doesn’t like rules. Masterpieces are always based on the transcendence of rules” (56), taking away this student’s idea of rules instantly helped release his inhibitions. It gave him the power to make his own rule, increase his confidence and step into the role his character. The imagination of this student was powerful and there was not much I sought to change about his performance. In opposition to the Ringmaster this student did not need to have a specific movement quality different from his everyday life. He plays the “innocent child” role; a young curious whimsical adolescent boy. Therefore, I asked him to be himself on the stage, because his natural movement was more than enough of what was needed. What I focused on with him was not the quality of his movement but I tweaked the effectiveness of his movement. A large concern with this student was the struggle to get him to make big movements on the stage to be readable by the audience. This boy is small and petite. His spirit is as large as a lion but his body says different. I worked with the innocent child on creating large gestural movements when discovering his gestural language. When coaching this child I had to find the balance between teaching and demonstrating. I

believe that when dealing with children in theatre, especially young children, it is important to find a balance between teaching and demonstrating because at such a young age it may be hard for them to understand metaphors and archetypes. If I said be very “slapstick” or “buffoonish” this child would not know what that meant. However, I could say be “playful” or “wild” but then I worried how he would find the specificity of actions in these general words. Consequently, as his a director I had to use words such as “playful” or “wild” and also give him small example. It was important for me as a director, that when I demonstrated, I never completed the entire task. I did not want the student to imitate my interpretation but I wanted him to be inspired by my demonstration. Once I blocked his movements I encouraged him to add his personality and do as I always tell my students to do; ‘make it your own and find your flair’! I feel confident that this was a successful process to use with this student. Fundamentally, my work with this student allowed him to build a strong character because he was able to interpret the specific movements he was given but also allowed to create his character in collaboration with me.

The Evil Emperor (Lucifer)

The role of the evil emperor is an important role because he essentially is the catalyst for conflict within the show. If I did not have this character/archetype, I would not have a show. He is the ruler of the evil circus and his greed for power motivates him. The Emperor is the antithesis of both the Ringmaster and Innocent Child. Without the Emperor there would be no balance of good and evil in the world. Essentially, when he kidnaps the Innocent Child, the Emperor tips the scale of this balance from good to evil. Since the Emperor changes this balance it is the job of the good circus to fight to restore the world back to its harmonic state. When the Evil Emperor enters the play he transitions the narrative of the play. Initially, before the Emperor enters, the play is light, cheerful, and adorable. However, fear, anticipation, anxiety or

suspense is experienced when the Evil Emperor makes his first entrance on the stage. This character as well as the other two roles requires immense stage presence. Characteristically and descriptively, the Emperor and Innocent Child are polar opposites. The Innocent Child is an extremely talented five year who is young, adorable, and has basic tumbling skills with clean martial arts. The qualities of the Evil Emperor needed to counter balance those of the Innocent Child. The Emperor was taller, older, and possessed a more aggressive style of martial arts. The student cast as the Emperor is very talented with passion, emotional connectivity and good intimidation tactics on the stage. The main focus for this student was to challenge him to find levels in his performance. As a student he is one of my strongest martial artist and actors. Following the same pattern of directing I used with the previous students, I first worked on determining the movement of this character. Together we worked on the Emperor's walk, stance, gestures and delivery of his martial arts. The Ringmaster has a fluid style of martial arts like following water; the Emperor has a harsh style of martial arts similar to the strength of a mountain. After establishing the base movement for the character, I challenged him to find ways to vocally, and physically express the levels of his emotions beyond anger and intimidation. In order to help him break through to the next level of his performance I taught him acting objectives and how to raise the stakes for his character. Once he understood this concept, he started to discover emotional expressions through his martial arts. His emotions spoke through his body. Each delivery of a technique such as a kick, punch, or a weapon was fueled by the pursuit of his objective. He physically heightened his martial arts technique to not be separate from his character to be the language of his character. This student was so memorable in creating his character, that periodically after the *M.A. Cirque* performance many of the younger students around my dojang would imitate the Evil Emperor. I observe younger students imitating

his movements, or attempting to kidnap one another during down times in between their martial arts classes. It has been said many times that ‘intimidation is the sincerest form of flattery.’ Due to his level of commitment and investment in his character, the Evil Emperor became an icon around the dojang. He was not just known for his martial arts, but he was known for how he performed his techniques. All three of these students required a different focus for performance; it is what gave depth to our storyline. I am glad for this experience because it stresses the importance of flexibility during the creative process. I am thankful for the three students’ discipline and commitment in the extra hours of rehearsals to explore their performance.

Creating a Language of Fights:

For this martial arts performance I decided to dedicate an unusually large portion of our performance to martial arts fight choreography. There are many ways to demonstrate the effectiveness of martial arts fighting that include light contact sparring, slow motion demonstration, and non-contact body damage simulation. Given these diverse methods martial arts practitioners may use to demonstrate their self-defense prowess I decided to establish a ‘language of fight’ for our rehearsal process. This was an extremely important phase of our process because since the students were trained martial artists but not trained actors, they needed to learn how to simulate fights without harming each other. To adjust the speed, accuracy and power of a trained martial artist is a challenge. This challenge was best overcome after I incorporated a class language for the fight choreography. The language of our fights consisted of three commands that were (1) slow down, (2) action star reaction and (3) more hi-yah. The command “slow down” was incorporated into rehearsals to prevent the students from training in a realistic martial arts style. I shared with my students that performing a martial arts routine realistically skilled can be unsettling for a non-martial artist to watch because the audience could

perceive the demonstration as too real and painful. I had to tell the students on several occasions the audience needed to understand their techniques and therefore they had to move at a significantly slower pace than normal to allow for the audience's eye to catch up to their movements. Once this was understood it became easier for me to make smaller adjustments to reshape a more audience friendly display of their techniques.

The second command "action star reaction" is actually a common style of training I use in my regular martial arts classes. Action star reaction encourages the students to spontaneously release creative impulse skills. The action star training teaches students the importance of finding the balance of play but with discipline within the martial arts classroom. It allows them to visualize potential martial arts effects on an opponent's body after the delivery of a kick or punch. In the rehearsal process I used action star because of the fighting is stylized, it is not realistic but it is extremely entertaining to watch. When students' movements became too small or introverted I would tell them to give me more "action star" to inspire larger movements.

Lastly, the final command I need to discuss is the phrase "more Hi-yah" The hi-yah is a Keup, which is a Korean word used in our school translated to 'a yell with energy'. Martial artists are notoriously known for excessive yelling, screaming, and breath control during martial arts training. Accordingly, since our students were performing on a grand hotel stage, I continually asked them to give me more "hi-yah" I wanted them to be heard as well as seen. Although our group uses ambient music to underscore a show I always insisted I needed to hear a balance between the show's musical score and the performers' real human sound. These three fight commands allowed us to all speak a common language during rehearsal despite anyone's age or experience. As a director it made things expeditious and clear when I was able to express what I wanted through a few simple terms.

In hindsight, the devising process of the show went wonderfully. Our students adapted to the extended show like professionals. During the continuation of rehearsals my students became used to a theatrical environment and eventually I did not have to spend too much time teaching acting lessons. The performance in Las Vegas was well received. Spectators, instructors and industry professionals gave praises to the demonstration team for their creation of a lively martial arts show.

Chapter Four: The Aftermath

A conclusion that marches forward in pedagogy

The examination of two martial arts super shows

The next chapter in my thesis entails the analysis of the performances of *The M.A. Cirque* and a more recent martial arts “super show” devised by my students and me. This is an important chapter in the creation for my thesis because after the completion of *The M.A. Cirque*, I was afforded the opportunity to devise another performance. This puts me in a great pedagogical position. Although, *The M.A. Cirque* was a unique devising process, I recently finished the creation of a second martial arts super show titled *Gods vs. Goddess: The Battle at Mt. Olympus (Olympus)*. The rehearsal and creation process of *Olympus* was a painless process. I believe this is due to the experience of the lessons learned from the experimentation of the original *M.A. Cirque*. This year for our tournament my team grew to thirty members large. I had a mix of students that have trained with me for six years and students that have only trained with me for three months to six years. Fundamentally, the experience of the students’ martial arts was as diverse as the experience of performance. After the success of *M.A. Cirque*, I decided to not run rehearsals as a martial arts instructor but solely as a director/choreographer. This was a noticeable shift from the previous devised process of *M.A. Cirque*, because during that process I had searched to find the balance between the roles of martial arts instructor, director, and choreographer. Balancing those roles was a taxing process, but I held those positions because of the lack of theatrical experience of the students. Being able to focus my attention as the director and choreographer of this process gave me the freedom to allow me help the students free their creativity, trust their impulses and most importantly, develop their characters. Therefore, in this

chapter I will analyze only the audition and rehearsal process of *Olympus* in comparison to *M.A. Cirque*.

Phase One: Auditions for Battle at Mt. Olympus:

Because of the discoveries made from devising *M.A. Cirque*, the Auditions for *Battle at Mt. Olympus*, ran smoothly. It was a one day audition process unlike the two day auditions for the *M.A. Cirque*. One major difference in casting was my creation of performance families. Since I was dealing with potentially casting thirty students I chose to create a cast based out of families. Each family possessed a certain level of martial arts skill not found in the other families. The family groups for the new show were the Olympians, demigods, Greeks, and Mystical beings.

Casting Breakdown was as follows:

Group 1 and 2: Olympians and demigods

- Skill Requirements
 - Advanced kicking: Proficiency of 360° jump spin kicks, advanced flexibility, good rhythm and coordination
 - Gymnastics/tumbling: dive roll, cartwheel, round-off, back handspring, back walkover etc.
 - Presence: powerful moves, sharp technique, and strong voice
 - Acting: Completion of basic scene study, improvisational ability, basic movement

Group 3: The Greeks

- Skill Requirements
 - Intermediate kicks: All jump spin kicks, some 360° kicks, flying side kick
 - Gymnastics/tumbling: basic roll, standing roll, all martial arts break falls
 - Knowledge of at least 3 martial arts forms

Group 4: Mythical beings

- Skill Requirements
 - Basic blocks/punches: knowledge of all basic punches and blocks
 - Gymnastics: Front and/or back fall
 - Must be able to maintain focus for a 2 hour class

With these requirements I was able narrow my selection of students for each individual part; and filter students into specific families during the casting process. Based on this structure it felt that the auditions were essentially initial screenings and call backs blended together. I condensed

three traditionally separate auditions into one large cattle call. At auditions students were placed into their respective groups based on their skill level and then tested with theatrical routines. The students' preparedness for these auditions surprised me immensely. During casting I was aware that the success of this martial arts story would rely on casting the three main Olympians. In order to believe a show based on mythical gods the Olympians must appear very skilled in both theatre and martial arts. Due to this necessity, I was first concerned with who would play the three main gods: Zeus (king of the gods), Poseidon (god of the seas) and Hades (god of the underworld). In Greek mythology these three gods are the most powerful Olympians. I was worried that I would not find the talent needed within my student body to correctly cast all three god roles. I had two older teenage boys (age 15 and 16) with exceptional talent, captivating presence and both were physically fit. They are tall, confident and execute extremely high ground and aerial kicks. Unless these two boys bombed the audition because of fear, bad attitude or some unknown variable affecting their performance, I knew they would be one of the three main gods. However, I did not have a third boy of similar stature and presence. I did have a lot of girl students that could have easily played one of those roles; however I was not interested in gender neutral casting. I wanted the girls to play the main goddess roles. Thus in auditions my main task was to first cast the three lead gods. One of the nine year old students who has trained under me for six years blew my mind in auditions. His knowledge of the martial arts and acting I have taught him humbled me to the core. His performance at auditions helped to reaffirm the validity of this personal method. Similar to the *M.A. Cirque* auditions, I led students through character building exercises. I asked students to build the body of a powerful god. Next I asked the students to perform a martial arts form as this god in that body center. The students had to perform as their god, one by one in front of me and the others. Instantly the nine year old

captivated the entire room. His presence radiated from his body and he was in full character. His martial arts skills popped with a power similar to an adult black belt. His eyes were void of himself and full of the life of character. I ceased the audition process, called the nine year old and the fifteen year old to center of the room. Auditions were no longer about who would be put into which family, it was about which one of these boys would play which lead god. I was sure who would play Zeus but I did not know who would be Hades and who would be Poseidon. I asked both students to perform one by one as Hades the god of the underworld. I could not stop watching both students, and was enamored with how much these two boys had learned about performance over the course of one year. Here was a nine year old barely four feet tall competing against a fifteen year old nearly seven feet tall (literally). Both boys had amazing martial arts and confidence in their performance. At this moment it was clear that I had trained student artists at the elementary and high school level. Despite the difference in age and size, I cast the oldest boy as Zeus, the other as Hades, and the nine year old as Poseidon. Rehearsal would prove to be very interesting with this mix of gods. The rest of auditions were physically taxing because in the totality of our work the students are doing a martial arts competition, thus our success relies on the strength of their physical technique. Similarly to the audition for *The M.A. Cirque*, I ran the audition similar to a dance or chorus call. When auditioning the Vegas production there was a nervous energy within the room because the students did not know what to expect. However, this time at auditions there was excited energy in the room filled with expectation and anticipation of the future process. To me it felt like the students were ready to perform again; they wanted to be back on the stage. The filtration of me creating specific groups of characters really narrowed down my time auditioning the students. I always think it is a challenge to audition my students because they are the only ones allowed to audition, therefore

sometimes I think I know what they can and cannot do. However, if I was asked to create another martial arts super show I would continue to audition the children because somehow they find a way to surprise me.

Rehearsals

The rehearsal process for *Olympus* was very interesting. Similar to the *M.A. Cirque* process, I had to find a balance of practicing martial arts and devising the play. Therefore the beginning work of our rehearsal was focused on building the ensemble and developing a common language for the stage. In the beginning of our process, again, I started with basic drum work to train the ensemble. This time in rehearsals the drum work was expected from the older experienced students. I had to do very little explanation of what drum work would entail, because the students with more experience helped to teach the novice students. In fact the students would start rehearsals without me, warm themselves up and have my drum prepared for me on the dojang mats. The drum work had become so effective that one day in rehearsal when I did not use the drum, our eldest team captain asked me “where was the drum, we need it”. The drum became an integral part of the rehearsal process.

Next, I revisited the concept of Sculpted Movement However; I added a new technique to our process this year called Hyper-Extended slow motion. Hyper- Extended slow motion is an exercise used to build presence and mobility through sustained pacing and rhythm. I learned this technique throughout my years with the RPDWC method. I wanted to use this technique for the fight scenes. I told them that executing our self-defense training in slow motion would surprise the judges because very few practitioners of martial arts use slow motion training in their routines. Essentially the slow motion drills fired up the children. They loved the exercises.

Artistically, my approach to continue to direct the students as performers gave me allowance to speak in metaphors and images encouraging the children to explore their characterization. Individually, some students were also instructed to create their own choreography for certain parts of the show. Some of the students loved this collaborative environment while it caused other students to get frustrated. Some of them wanted me to continue to create all their move sequences like I had done the many years in the past. However, I insisted the students were older and with more experience thus it was time for them to use what they had been taught. Accordingly, I let them know I would spend most of my time training the younger and newer students. The older children were instructed to create routines and present them to me for review. I would then critique the presentation, give them notes and send them back to their personal rehearsal. In this process my objective was to teach the children (especially the older students) the concept of self-discipline and self-motivation. I did not want them to continue to rely on my creative intelligence. I encouraged a collaborative environment expecting the students to find ways to use the techniques I had taught them with acting and martial arts. After I encouraged more collaboration, the first few weeks of devising were painful. Again, the students were afraid to trust their impulses because they were now in charge of character creation. In response to this fear I continued to validate their choices and coached them to creating stronger. Within the middle of the rehearsal process the children really started to tackle their characters. Running rehearsals in this fashion allowed me to really step back and review the piece as a play and not a martial arts routine.

Script Summary

The *Battle at Olympus* devised story is a simple yet powerful one. The themes of this performance are jealousy and redemption. The story takes place after Zeus defeats his father the

Titan Cronus and claims control over the earth. Zeus the self-proclaimed king of the gods splits the earthly kingdom between his brother Poseidon and Hades. Poseidon gains control over the seas and Hades is given control of the underworld. Initially this deal between the three brothers is appealing to them. However, as time evolves more gods and goddesses are created and given dominion over specific parts of the universe. Hades slowly develops a jealousy for his brother Zeus because he is forced to live in the underworld and believes Zeus tricked him into claiming dominion over the underworld. Zeus the king of the gods also has a jealous counterpart; his very own wife queen Hera. Hera constantly struggles with the jealousy she holds for Zeus that she eventually is persuaded to collaborate with Hades and his wife Persephone to overthrow the current king of the gods. As Hades' evil plan unfolds Zeus is overthrown and captured by Hades and his cohorts. However, Poseidon and Athena (goddess of wisdom and war) escape the wrath of Hades, which allows them to unite a powerful army of gods and demi-gods to fight for the reclamation of the throne and release Zeus from his prison. Hades, with his cohorts of jealous gods, and an army of Greek zombies declares war on the fugitive Olympians. A fierce battle ensues.

The battle proves to overwhelm the allies of Zeus. However, Hades underestimates the power of the mystical beings; the fairies, satyrs, tree nymphs etc. The magical community that resides in the mystical beings is collectively powerful when combined with one another. Just as Athena is battling Hades to the death and starting to lose, the united magical community rushes to her aid. The mythical beings use their magic to distract Hades, which allows Athena to deliver a mighty kick to Hades that severely weakens his power. As Hades' power starts to decline and fall, the magical community wrestles Hades to the ground, allowing the king of the magic community to run onto the battle field and deliver a powerful punch to the face of Hades.

Hades now overthrown realizes he was wrong to let jealousy consume his desires so much that he caused death and destruction over a world that he once shared with his two brothers. Hades repents to Zeus, ceases his army and combines his power with Athena's power in order to heal the Greek land. Zeus is set free, balance is restored to the earth and the Olympians celebrate the power of forgiveness, bringing an end to an epic martial arts routine.

The storyline is similar to *M.A. Cirque*, but it is effective. It also should be recognized that I am working with children and I think it is important to teach them the value of morals. Jealousy and anger are common traits in mankind. I want the students to learn early in life that if they don't work through emotions, they can consume us and cause us to act irrationally, but forgiveness is always possible. Also, I wanted the students to understand that they are not just entertainers but also teachers. I want them to learn that theatre and martial arts can be used to teach the importance of values in a society.

Was this production successful?

Due to the knowledge of the pros and cons of the *M.A. Cirque*, this devised show was a successful production. First, the rehearsal process was less hands on and I did not have to lead students the way I had to lead them a year prior to this performance. After both productions the students understood the value of performance. With that being acknowledged, they also became more vocal and physically engaged in rehearsals. During this second creation process the students were more focused than before because they understood how to synthesize theatre and martial arts. Overall, this production was successful for two main reasons. First the students completed the devising process in little over two months as opposed to a year prior when it took the group four months to create and revise *The M.A. Cirque* and remount it for Vegas in three

months. Second, the other reason I would say the students routine was successful is because we won first place again; another testament to power that martial arts and theater can create.

What would I change?

If I were to change anything about the devising and directing process of this martial arts performance, it would be the length of the necessary pre- production work. During each creation process of our shows I would research, write, revise, and choreograph during the process. Although, this has worked several times it is a daunting task. I would like to adjust my preproduction work to allow proper time for conceptualization. It is important to understand that this pre-production schedule would be for designing an outline of the story's creation. With the students of various ages it is helpful to have the Skelton of the show developed before allowing the students to collaborate on the show's development. My ideal outline for conceiving a show before the student's first rehearsal for martial arts performance is thus:

- 4 weeks research and dramaturgy
- 2 – 3 weeks script creation
- 2 – 3 weeks production meetings (costumes, stage construction, props, stage management)
- 2 – 3 weeks choreography development

This may or may not appear to be a long time to devise a show but I have discovered that children who are not performance students should be given more specific structure from the director during rehearsals. The first phase of my creation cycle is the dramaturgical research and study guides. Most of the children will not research the world of the play being created. Therefore, my goal during pre-production dramaturgy would be to design a study guide with in depth sources for adults and an additional child friendly study pack as well. For the children, these sources would need to be both entertaining and educational.

Accordingly, if I were to market this method to an outside agency it would probably be most attractive to another martial arts facility or a children's theatre company who may not have a resident dramaturge. Phase two of the creation cycle would allow me to write the script within two to three weeks. This would give me time to develop a generic outline for the students that would be flexible to the cast selected. During both devising processes I had the first half of the script created and then the second half created mid-way in rehearsals. It proved easier in rehearsals to have an idea of what I wanted the students to do and then change it if necessary. In regards to creating the script during rehearsals, the dual focus of directing and writing naturally proved overwhelming for the students. For each rehearsal where I had a predetermined script or scene the students rehearsed extremely well. However, we were in the devising process which is a process of uncertainty. As the students teacher/director it was a personal objective to help them look beyond what was obvious and discover the joy what resided in the unknown.

Phase four would also provide around three weeks for choreography development. Similar to the writing process, it is helpful to develop an outline of the fight choreography and then allow the students to create more specific choreography according to their skill level. Again, some days when I would workshop a fight sequence or a form during rehearsal it caused the students to become overwhelmed. I learned that children want to balance creativity, with structure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of this process has been a culmination of personal discoveries. When I first started working on merging certain elements of theatre and martial arts I had no idea how expansive the journey would be. Initially my objective was to develop a fun performance for students that would challenge them beyond their standard martial arts competition routines. As the years have passed, the students have grown and they have learned a new way to express themselves both physically and creatively. Our process has become a specific process representative to our school. When taking this work outside our studio, a main challenge could be the students may not have either the desired level of training in martial arts or drama that is required for working in this method. This factor could potentially alter the length of production development.

The work that we do at our dojang has become ongoing consistent training required of the students involved with our demonstration team. The training has become part of their monthly curriculum. When students join our team they are committed to training for one full year. However, majority of the students have trained an average of three to four years, a length of training equitable to a four year college career of a performance student.

Fundamentally, it is important to recognize that this process of theatre and martial arts is truly an expansion of the performance arts. After working with students on both martial arts and theatre, I noticed an amazing enhancement in their self-confidence. I believe this is because of the physical and creative power the students experienced through their artistic training. More time should be spent organizing the outlining structure of performance before going into rehearsals. Through successful dramaturgy and conceptualization before the first day of rehearsal the group could potentially accomplish a lot more.

As mentioned earlier the method I explored over these past few years is inspired by more popular giants in theatre such as the Peking Opera, No theatre, Cirque Du Soleil, or Kabuki Theatre. Naturally, I respect the work of this ancestry and personally I would cherish any opportunity to work for or with them. It is because of their progress that I have been able to explore a personal process birthed from my creative womb. Some actors are skilled dancers, singers, poets or musicians who are able to combine and interpret their creative processes for an interdisciplinary form on the stage. I am an artist who is a highly skilled martial artist; therefore naturally I am searching to find ways to integrate my talents on the stage. Based on the success of seven national championships, one Las Vegas invitational, and several students now involved in local community theatre I believe this work can be deemed a successful artistic endeavor. This is an infused pedagogical methodology of a movement in dramatic form useful to the trained martial artist and the trained actor.

Currently, I am researching effective methods to teach this process to students outside of our studio. I believe the martial arts extensively allow a trained artist to experience a new way of interpreting their craft. This method can help turn the martial artist into an actor as well as turn the actor into a martial artist.

Revelations

Often times I think of what the next level of this work will entail. As of now there is a method developed and a pedagogy structured. If desired, the work is now accessible to other communities. Accordingly, I believe that moving this work forward into various communities will help strengthen the effectiveness of the method. It is evident that our dojang created a form of dramatic interpretation that effectively works for us. However, if the method only works for our student population, if it only lives within our community, than it cannot survive. The longevity of this method, in similarity with various other methods, resides within its ability to transform artists and audiences in/outside our home community. Currently, my personal development is shifting focus to a pedagogical exchange with the broader artistic community. Over the past year I have been fortunate to share this method; watching it develop and grow within a wider context. The martial art industry has been changed, artist use this method to strengthen their bodies and voices, and professionals seek more information on this method in hopes to use it at their martial arts schools.

Raising the Industry Standard

As previously mentioned this work began out of an impetus to develop a uniquely challenging martial arts competition routine. From that venue of performance the work has grown into the dramatic form it is today. Due to the influence of our team's competitions and performances I have noticed a change in the industry standards of competition performances. Each year, other teams have attempted to incorporate theatrical elements into their martial arts routines that are similar of our team's aesthetic. This past April of 2011, I was fortunate enough to be a visiting instructor at the Martial Arts World national tournament event in Orlando, FL. Our team did not compete this year because we decided to take a much needed break from the

competition circuit. However, sitting on a panel as a visiting instructor observing various other teams compete allowed me to witness the influence of our team's history. Out of seven competing teams, each group had a unique theatrical infusion to their competition routine. Fundamentally, the first and second place winners had routines very reminiscent of the formula for the method devised by the students and myself. These teams had a story, costumes, archetypical characters and a synthesis of martial arts and theatre. It was clear that they studied our past routines.

After competition I went to congratulate one of the coaches from the top two teams on a successful performance when she informed me that the work I had done with the students at our school inspired their team to attempt to compete in a similar manner. One of the other students from the first place team tracked me down and asked why our team did not compete. I informed her that it was time for us to take a break from so many years of competing at the level we have competed at. She understood but said her team was really hoping to challenge our team with their new theatrical routine.

I do not bring awareness to these two encounters as way to brag or boast of the impact our team has had on the competition circuit. I acknowledge these instances because it illustrates a positive impact our method of performance had on students, audiences, and other industry practitioners.

Conferences and Workshops

Recently I have also been afforded opportunities to extend the reach of this method with various theatre and martial arts professionals at different conferences and workshops. In August of 2010 at the Voice and Speech Trainers Association's (VASTA) annual conference in Mexico City, Mexico I facilitated a morning physical and vocal group warm up titled "Releasing Ki".

Releasing Ki, was developed as a method to bring the martial arts to the actor. It is a workshop I developed based on a set of exercises, meditations and breathing patterns from within the martial arts that help prepare the performance artist for work. Releasing Ki was widely accepted among the conference. Various voice and speech professionals appreciated the combined physical and vocal approach to accessing breath support and bodily presence. A copy of the submitted workshop proposal is provided in Appendix D.

In January of 2011 I was invited to Orlando, FL to co-present a workshop to martial arts instructors on the foundational principles of this method. The workshop entailed a list of guided principles necessary to develop their student martial arts competition team in similarity to ours. The first section of the workshop instructs participants on the necessary structure that prepares the community for successful work in a devising process with martial arts. In the workshop advice is given on how to audition students, collaborate with parents, and incorporate ritual practices in rehearsal. The second part of the workshop advises participants on how to effectively combine the martial arts with different theatrical elements. Participants gain advice on what types of performances blend well with martial arts such as dance, archetypal interpretations, and musical scores. The successes and failures of our team's process is shared in order to help guide other coaches, directors and choreographers into a successful team production.

Archetype Exploration

It is a clear recognition that the works we have been doing over these past few years have included many archetypal presentations of either modern or traditional archetype figures. Thus, after reading Janet Rodgers and Frankie Armstrong's book *Acting and Singing with Archetypes*, I decided to lead the students on a facilitated archetype journey. It should be noted that although

our work uses archetypal characters, the students have never been led on a guided journey in order to access connection to their character, as developed by Rodgers and Armstrong. Typically, in our devising process the students work closely with the instructor/director (in this case myself) on how to play the archetypal ‘cues’ of a given character.

I wanted to start incorporating the methods of Rodgers and Armstrong because their work is more expansive and solidified for use in the devising process. Rodgers and Armstrong have spent years of their career carefully developing pedagogy for acting with archetypes. To me, adding the use of guided archetype journeys is what will help take this martial arts pedagogy methodology to its next level of stage performance. Below are two journal entries of notes from the days I used theatre games and archetype journeys in our dojang.

Journal Entries: February 17 & 18, 2011

In general using theatre practices help the studio because during martial arts training, order is always present, focus is given, discipline is enforced and play is rarely honored. However, in today’s modern society, I think it is time for martial arts schools to find the balance between play and order—if they want a thriving child friendly studio. As a result of this belief, I am always searching for ways to incorporate simple, fun playful release into my martial arts classes. The best way I know to do so is by incorporating Theatre games in the classroom. When adding theatre into the class it allows students to find a way to express and release through a craft they feel safe with. Theatre games provide just the right amount of play to the structured environment.

Exercise One: Beat Constructions

In today’s class I shared with the students the simplicity of telling a story. We discussed [in relation to martial arts theatre], the importance of finding ways to non-verbally communicate to

diverse audiences; recognizing that not all stories have to be told through the use of words or language. Their task today was to create a story through improvisation based on an archetype and centered on the execution of one martial arts move; ‘the breaking technique’. It is important to remember that a central element of this martial arts theatre resides in finding ways to merge the movement of the martial arts with the interpretation of performance arts. Thus, the martial arts become the predominant gestural movement of their character. This is why during the journey students had to find impetus to execute the Breaking Technique. I instructed them to break down their technique as: (1) a pre-beat, (2) action, (3) post-beat. With this combination the students could effectively create a simple story through physical action. I told the students to think of archetypal beings, such as the Crone, the devil, the hero, or the noble warrior. I asked them to tell me what makes each figure memorable? For instance, what makes them a “noble warrior”?

After the pedagogical explanation, I let the students practice for about 5 – 10 minutes each. I had the students show me what they created. The results were staggering. It was exciting to see students have a pre-beat, action and post-beat for just one move for the stories they created. The power and intensity of their martial arts movements was elevated to a new level of execution that was extremely impressive. The clarity of the story that students told were impressive. Interestingly enough I asked one kid to explain why he did what he did and his answer in short was “I wanted to find a way to combine Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris”—two modern day actors noted for playing the noble warrior archetypes.

The Journey of Apollo and Dionysus: 2-18-2011

Today we explored the temples of Apollo and Dionysus. I chose this journey because I believe that the foundation of the work the students and I create through our martial arts performances rest at the feet of Apollo and Dionysus--the house of order and the house of play.

Yesterday's exploration of beat construction and definition of Archetypes was essentially their warm up into the archetypal journey of Apollo and Dionysus as described by Rodgers and Armstrong. Per the instructions for the journey I separated the students into two houses based off of an "A/B" count. The students were then instructed to close their eyes and listen as I then called out words related to the two houses. They opened their eyes and the journey began. As with previous acting exercises I reminded the students that they must find a way to incorporate their martial arts as part of the language of their character. No character and no story had to only be about martial arts, but there should be some semblance of craft present—even if it is one move.

The results were stammering and diverse. Some of the children created martial arts fight sequences and some of them created individual movement routines. In the temple of Dionysus, the students organically improvised scenes and/or martial arts choreography as characters such as clowns, playful children, jesters, or comedians. In the temple of Apollo, students created characters that were relatable to historic warriors, protectors (Armed Services), dueling brothers, disciplinarians (someone became a figure representative of a Police Officer) etc.

Naturally some students were more susceptible to either the principles of Apollo or Dionysus; for some it was a challenge for them to be the opposite of their daily behaviors. It was a great lesson for them to learn to be a character and not themselves. One student actually broke down and began crying in the middle of his journey. This student was in the house of Dionysus and he felt he did not belong there. He expressed that he did not think 'play' should be in the martial arts studio and accordingly he could not play at this time. He wanted to be in the temple of Apollo. The student and I talked for a little while about what exactly 'play' means and how it is not a negative thing nor is it a negative word. I told him that "to play means to love, people

play because it makes them feel good. I asked him if play is to love, then how is it bad?" The student thought about what we talked about and eventually slowly started to move back into the group function. Even when he went back into room, he was apprehensive. However, he slowly gave in to his instincts. He started to play, he smiled, he played some more, and he laughed, and he did it all with his martial arts that he cares so much about. That day that kid and some others had a small breakthrough in their personal process. His breakthrough was big enough to make an impact on him and his concept of play. Since that day each time he has come to class and we play with theatre instead of traditional martial arts, he is more connected to trust in his love of play. I look forward to seeing how other archetype journeys will affect the student body as we explore more of this work.

"Nietzsche believed that if was the collision of the Dionysian with the Apollonian that brought about the best of Greek Tragedy. In Greek Mythology both Dionysius and Apollo were sons of Zeus by different mothers. Apollo came to represent order and discipline while Dionysius came to represent impulsiveness and play." (Rodgers and Armstrong 154)

Working with Actors

As a director I use the martial arts as a way to build unity within ensemble theatre groups. The martial arts are usually taught each day to the cast before they began any textual or character work on the play. Using martial arts as an opening exercise encourages a physical, mental and emotional readiness in the actor. Actors have found this process to be helpful in accessing their personal energy available to rehearse. Accordingly, it helps to release an actor's tension, stress, apprehensions and physical stiffness. After a successful duration of martial art practice is when the actor is usually accessible for the text.

Additionally, I have been working with a fellow actor/dancer on exploring the similarities of martial arts and dance. Currently, we are engaging in pedagogical exchanges of the physical conditioning and movement similarities within both crafts. First, in the study we review the histories of the creation of both crafts, then train in the basic principles required of a martial arts student and a dance student. Recently we began examining the subtle differences in spins, turns, twists and aerial techniques present within dance and martial arts regiments. Although, some discoveries have been made in regards to how the two crafts empower the body to move, this study is still in development.

As I continue to teach at conferences, presentations and examine the interdisciplinary principles of theatre and martial arts it is clear that this thesis is only the beginning of a huge journey. This thesis culminates the study of a graduate school career but begins the professional exploration of continuing to develop a new martial arts theatre movement. There are many more ideas, principles, philosophies, artists, and cultures to learn from in order for this work to grow and strengthen.

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Appendix A – Script of M.A. Cirque

The M.A. Cirque: The Evolution

A theatrical exploration of martial arts and dramatic story telling

Directed/Choreographed and conceptualized By Donzell Lewis

Originally developed for the Martial Arts World National Championships in
Orlando, Florida April 2009

Revised and Remounted for the Martial Arts Leader's Summit held in Las Vegas,
Nevada, November 2009

The M.A. Cirque – Script Outline

Cast of Characters -

1. Innocent Child
2. Ringmaster 1
3. Ringmaster 2
4. Imperial Twins (1 boy/ 1 girl)
5. Prince of Darkness
6. Princess of Darkness
7. Evil Minions (4 boys)
8. Circus Clowns (3 – 7)
9. Townspeople (as many needed)

The cast of characters is a general placement of character families. When casting performers it is important to understand that within each acting family the director may expand or reduce the number of bodies representing that family. According, it is important to understand that traditionally in the martial arts competition circuit students on demonstration teams perform in duos, trios or large group. Solo performances are rare and reserved for students with either exceptional talent or a special skill that will boost a team's ranking in competition. In regards to this cast of characters, the ringmaster and innocent child have solo routines because of special talents they both possessed at the time of creation. The other characters typically performed with at least one other character while on stage.

Description of Cycles (Scenes)

Prologue – Music box of dreams

Cycle One – It's a Family Affair

Cycle Two - Enter the Emperor

Cycle Three – The night belongs to the queen

Cycle Four – Imperial Struggles

Cycle Five – Armageddon

Epilogue – Colors of love

Prologue w/ voice over–

Setting: Bedroom of Innocent Child (5 – 7 years old)

Time: Bedtime, just after dinner

The bedroom of the innocent child is layered with typical “boy” toys. There is a dinosaur, ball, blanket, pillow, and slinky etc. The room appears slightly messy but not too out of control. Downstage right, there is a large toy chest. At the end of the voice over, child wakes up starts to play with each of his toys. Innocent child easily gets bored with each toy after about five seconds of play. Once he is done with each toy, he puts it in the toy chest and plays with another. Eventually the child finds his dinosaur and is enraptured by the thought of prehistoric

life. The child becomes extremely animated with the dinosaur; he starts to make primal sounds, walks as the dinosaur across the stage etc. At this time, the chest magically starts to open. The chest is a portal to another land, a land the child has not discovered, but because of his pure innocence and childlike play his spirit has activated this portal. Slowly, the circus ringmaster climbs out of the chest. Attempting to play with the child, she actually scares him. He has shut down, protects his innocence and gives into fear. Ringmaster then attempts to appease the child with games, toys, and even magic. The child accepts ringmaster's apology and ringmaster has now gained a new friend. She decides to take him into her world to meet her circus. As the ringmaster and child travel across the stage in a circular motion (indicating a transition of space and time), the curtain draws and reveals an exciting new circus world. Child visits the circus and gets ready for the first show.

- End of Prologue -

Cycle one – It's a family Affair

Setting – The Circus Land

Time- any (time does not exist in circus land)

Beginning of cycle one starts with circus games. This scene should embody your typical circus.

Most actions are mimed such as the lion tamer and his lions, a tight rope walker, etc. Each circus performer will face a different direction on the stage to give the perception of a “Big Top” circus field. After innocent child visits each “tent” of the circus, they unite under the “main-stage”.

Next the circus performers display a martial arts Poomse (Korean word mean form). This poomse should be a light poomse, nothing too aggressive but similar to a soft open hand form.

Next segment the circus performer entertains their audience with simple or advance (depending on talent) talent circle. In the circle the townspeople boast their talents in front of each other.

Each person trying to have a more dominant technique than the others. This talent contest should have a hint of circle dance with a high mixture of martial arts techniques. The students should

show complex hand routines, high kicks, explosive jumps and board breaking if possible. Once the students have had a chance to entertain the audience with their display of techniques, the performance should switch back into circus arts. A transition of sound, movement and music will single “Enter the Clowns”. As the townspeople react to the transition, the clown families enter the arena. This segment should be mixed with slapstick and group martial arts routines. The slapstick can be very simple and clean with three lead clowns. These three lead clowns will perform most of the slapstick routines. Essentially, the clowns will perform group martial arts and as transitions between each group martial arts routine there should be a slapstick routine. In this production the clowns are usually the youngest students also by age and experience. Excited by what he sees, the Innocent Child is ushered off the stage with members of the circus. Once the clowns finish their performance the innocent child re-enters the stage dressed as an honorary clown. However, he is only dressed in clown garb and thus he becomes the only character in the show without makeup. When The Innocent Child partakes in the circus, his movement should be a mix of gymnastics, martial arts and whimsical child. The Innocent Child continues to play with his new clown family.

- End of Cycle One -

Cycle Two – Enter the Emperor

Setting- Circus ground and dark lair

Time – evening of circus play

Beginning of cycle two comes after an entrance from the Evil Emperor himself. The Emperor should somehow find a way to startle, scare, or “freeze” the young clowns. In this production the Emperor was be one of the older students of the group. It was important that his presence be larger than the other characters. After his entrance, the Emperor scatters the clowns, takes over the circus and kidnaps the innocent child. As the Emperor leaves with innocent child, his evil

minions or foot soldiers follow behind him. It is important that when casting the clowns and the minions the final selection should represent an antithesis of the groups in appearance and skill. For militaristic weapons The Minions are skilled in the art of bo staff. They will use these weapons as martial arts tools and as primal war weapons to capture and/or ward off enemies. The loss of the Innocent Child leaves the clowns in mourning and susceptible to enemy attack. The minions take this time to advance on the weakened clown family and capture the remaining lot. The minions follow Emperor to his dark lair, using their bo staffs as spears to herd the clowns. This transition is signaled by a figure eight marching pattern through the downstage and center stage sectors. When the minions enter their cave, they handcuff and throw the clowns into their cage. Once the clowns are locked up, the minions perform an advanced martial arts bo staff form. This form should be extremely aggressive and full of technical spins and flips. The motive behind the performance is to parade their superior dominance over the clowns. After the bo staff form, the minions should taunt, tease and torture the clowns. The Emperor eventually ceases the taunting of the clowns, after the innocent child has been caged. Then the Emperor and minions perform a martial arts routine together. This form may be an open or closed hand form and/or this is a good time to include fight choreography. This routine is interrupted by the Princess of Darkness, the elder to the evil characters. As she enters the stage the rest of the fortress should bow in recognition to her presence. She notices the capture of the clowns and the innocent child and is pleased that her army has now taken over a major foothold of the circus.

-End of *Cycle two*—

Cycle Three - The night belongs to the Queen!

Setting – Lair of the Dark overlords

Time – Nightfall

Pleased with the capture of new clown souls, the Queen of darkness is ready to exercise her

magical control over her beings. The queen of darkness uses magic powers to freeze all clowns, as she walks on a platform above the clowns. The Queen then ejects “strings or cords” from her dress. These strings represent extension of her magical powers—the ability to control subjects minds. She freezes the clowns and then proceeds to turn them into puppets. Next the Queen puppeteers the clowns (now puppets) into servitude. This act of servitude is symbolized through the execution of an open hand soft style martial arts form, very reminiscent of the craft of Tai Chi. As the clowns move throughout the routine, the Queen should be elevated above the puppets to give the image puppets and puppet-master. The form ends when the queen has decided she is bored with her new slaved beings. Exit the queen, and the stage goes dark on the clowns.

When the lights dim, the scene is changed back into Circus Land, where the Innocent Child was kidnapped. The Ringmaster rushes onto the stage after she hears something is wrong with her circus. As she enters the stage she realizes the clowns have disappeared and only the hat of the innocent child remains. She is in frenzy. Enter the Imperial Twins, brother and sister warriors of the circus family. They console the ringmaster and vow to find the stolen clowns and missing innocent child. The twins exit.

Tear– Dance of the lost

Setting – between time and space

Time – the now

This scene should be choreographed and staged to simulate a dream sequence, something made of fantasy. This routine is a break/tear/change in conventions of the performance. It is a moment of connection between the ringmaster and the audience. It is a mourning scene for the ringmaster. The movement qualities should combine balletic dance, lyrical dance and martial arts advance spin kicking. Lights dim on all the stage except for the ringmaster. She is

distraught searching the stage for the lost innocent child. As she realizes the loss of the child, she recognizes that innocence has now been taken away from the circus world and darkness is fast approaching. She mourns this situation, contracting to her knees to pray, meditate or just cry. She begins her choreographed form which should not appear to be martial arts and it should not appear to be dance, but something of its own creation. Since this moment is a “break” in the scene it is imperative that the form not appear to be martial arts. At some point in the song the innocent child and ringmaster will perform an eight count of the same moves together. They are not allowed to see each other, their performance is happening in two different locations. The use of spotlights may help emphasis this idea of different settings. The movement sequence ends and the break is over. Return to cycle three – *The night belongs to the queen*

The setting to the lair is reestablished through light and music. The queen enters the stage again. This scene is not to control the clowns but to have the dark empire marvel at her powers. This scene is an anti-thesis to the ringmaster's “Dance of the Lost” scene. The queen performs a beautifully dark Chinese Water Sleeve dance, (sometimes referred to as “long sleeve dance”). This routine symbolizes the magical power of the Queens extension throughout the land. It is important to make clear that at this moment of the show she has reappeared three times each as a different manifestation of herself. No other being in her kingdom can possess this ability.

-End of Cycle three-

Cycle Four – Imperial struggles

Setting – Circus land and Dark Lair

Time- Soon after Innocent Child's kidnap

As the queen's water sleeve dance ends, lights should fade out on the upstage acting area, a song change should gradually signal a transition in the scene. The imperial warriors enter the stage, first on an outside road. This road is not signaled by a scene change, thus the traffic pattern of

the twins should be used to signal their change in time and distance. In addition to their specific traffic pattern, non-traditional platforms will be used to expand the extension of the stage. Since this production will be performed in a Las Vegas Hotel banquet hall, two banquet tables will be staged in front of the floor of the proscenium stage. These tables are to be islands, isles, hills etc. of travel along the twins journey. The twins enter the stage and perform a dynamic sword routine. This routine will mix traditional martial arts, gymnastics and martial arts flying kicks. The twins decide to survey the land in search of the missing members. They split up, jump off the stage and perform part of their sword routine on the tables set in the audience. They jump down, run back on stage and as they do so they have now discovered the hidden lair of the dark overlords. The twins search the lair, find the innocent child and attempt to free him. Successfully the twins free all of the captured clowns. As they attempt to free the innocent child they are caught by the dark overlord and his minions. A battle attempts to ensue. The twins realizing they are outnumbered and fight their way to an exit, causing both sides to seek allies.

Cycle five – Armageddon

Setting – Outside the Dark Lair

Time – A day after the previous cycle

In cycle four we see that the twins have now freed the clowns but were outnumbered in battle against the dark forces of the circus. Now with the dark lair discovered the twins seek assistance from other townspeople, and the ringmaster. They all prepare for war. Both forces meet on the battle field, prepared to die. An intense group battle ensues. This fight choreography should be primal but with an element of grace. There are to be casualties on both sides. We should get a sense of the encroaching end of the circus as we know it. As the battle continues, the innocent child searches for ways to free escape his prison. Eventually he breaks free. Upon his freedom innocent child rushes onto the battle field and ceases the entire battle the a screaming sound cue

of “STOP”. The inner “light” of the innocent child is more powerful than the jealousy and hatred present within the good and evil forces of the circus. The innocent child is composed of pure innocence and truth. Evoking his power from within the innocent child throws his arms outward and causes all warriors to either bow in submission or roll back away from the battle. At the sight of this reaction the Innocent child realizes he has a true power and he runs around the battle field and decides to bring all casualties back to life. His generosity makes all others realize the destruction their selfishness has caused. All the characters make peace with each other and The Innocent Child takes pride in this reconciliation and exits the stage. The evil and good forces unite and realize they are strong together as a team and perform a final martial arts Poomse (form), using their talents to strengthen the group.

Epilogue – Reunited Once and for all

Setting – Circus land and Bedroom of Innocent Child

Time- Immediately after the Battle

After the performance and reconciliation of the two opposing circus members, all performers exit the stage. The stage goes dark for 3 – 5 seconds causing a sense of “ending” for the audience. However, this is a false ending and after the dead time the Ringmaster re-enters the stage as the catalyst to the beginning of a Grand Finale. The grand finale should be the moment that audience members feel a sense of a “3 ring circus”. One by one all characters and families re-enter the space through the stage, the audience and the satellite stages to perform many different acts. The main stage will host performances from all the key characters of the show. Their performance should be full of different advance martial arts including bo staff, open hand forms, gymnastics, sword forms, and synchronized team forms. This main stage performance should aesthetically please audience members as though they were watching a balletic demonstration of the martial arts. On the satellite stages, two – three characters will perform a “color guard flag

routine”. This routine will add variety of performance to the grand finale. Additionally, the flag routine should also be symbolic of some martial arts techniques. Similarly, the townspeople will enter through the house and engage the audience through ribbon dance performance. The ribbon dancing should be a means to connect to the audience, engage them and evoke their visual senses. Lastly, the clowns of the show will enter through the back of house seating area and pass out traditional “red nose” clown masks to various audience members. This is a monument of appreciation from the performers to the audience.

-End of Show-

Appendix B – Script for Mt. Olympus

Gods vs. Goddesses: The Battle for Mt. Olympus

A Devised Martial Arts Super Show presented in 5 cycles

*Created in accordance the 2010 Martial Arts World National
Championship team rules and regulations*

Directed/Choreographed and Conceived by Donzell Lewis

Cycles:

- Prologue – Pageant of Divinity
- Cycle One – We three Kings
- Cycle Two – Peace on Earth
- Cycle Three – The consumption of Hades
- Cycle Four – The battle for Olympus
- Cycle Five – United we stand
- Epilogue – Restoration

Cast of Characters:

The Olympians:

- Zeus
- Hades
- Poseidon
- Athena
- Hera
- Persephone
- Aphrodite
- Apollo
- Ares
- Hermes

The Demi-gods

- Hercules
- Pericles
- need name

Community of Greeks

- 5 – 7 citizens

Mythical Beings/Magical Community

- 5 – 7 magical creatures
 - May be fairies, tree nymphs, satyrs, goblins, etc.

The cast of characters can be extended or shortened in accordance to the number of performers available. The reduction or addition of characters is best delineated within the roles for the Greeks and/or Mythical Beings and not the deities.

Prologue – Pageant of Divinity

Setting- Mount Olympus

Time – After the sun rises upon the earth

A start of show, stage is bare, blank and lightly dim. The stage should give the essence of a desolate but mysterious strange land. As the curtain is pulled back, voice over should play in order to provide the “given circumstances” of the world of the play for the audience.

Voice-Over (accompanied by ambient music)

Long ago in a land of legends, fables, and kings, three gods ruled the earth. Zeus ruler of the heavens shared the earth with his two brothers; Poseidon ruler of the seas, and Hades ruler of the underworld. Zeus king of the gods; held dominion over the Olympians known as Hera queen of the gods, Athena goddess of wisdom and war, Persephone goddess of the spring, Aphrodite goddess of beauty and love, Apollo god of the sun, Aries god of war, and Hermes messenger to the gods where they ruled from their heavenly palace on Mount Olympus. They lived in peace and cooperation until one day; anger, jealousy and pride consumed Hera, Persephone and Hades causing them to craft an evil plot to overthrow Zeus and seize his throne on Mount Olympus. A mighty war was forged that shook the heavens, and rumbled the earth. Today this is where our story unfolds....

{Once voice-over ends, the statues of the Olympians are revealed. These statues are the performers of the show, frozen in sculpted movement on top of a plastered pedestal.}

Slowly enter the magical community. They circle around the Olympian statues, very balletic in form and movement. After the circle of the gods and goddess they perform a simple martial arts form, designed to demonstrate their unity and uniformity as a magical community. The emphasis of this form should not be about their level of skill but the focus is to be on their timing and synchronicity. Once the form is completed, selected mythical beings will dance around their favorite female deity and bless this statue with either a wand, or fairy dust etc. This worship of the female gods in turn pleases the goddesses arousing them from their slumber to celebrate in their power and admiration. The goddesses martial art based choreography should also be balletic or lyrical in structure displaying beauty and grace but should have an essence of power and destruction. For this production the goddesses performed will execute a traditional “fan form”. The fans are a traditional martial arts weapon, historically used to disguise powerful

martial arts technique through the grace and beauty of the exoticism the dance-like sequences of a fan. After completion of the goddesses fan form, they will kneel in “waiting” in front their altars and empower the awakening of the younger gods Ares, Hermes, and Apollo. (*These three gods are referred to in this script as servant gods. However, the term “servant” is not meant to imply a lesser ability. It is in reference to their positions within the divine order of gods. These three gods hold domain over War, Messages, and the sun, thus they are only used in a task manner.*) Once awakened the servant gods will execute a form built upon power and courage. This form should be very aggressive in presentation but not violent. The form should walk the line between violent and aggressive. (*For this production, we will use a traditional Korean form called Koryo*) They bow and turn toward the three elder gods, in suspense for their awakening.

-End of Prologue-

Cycle 1: We three kings

Setting: Mt. Olympus

Time: After the pageant of divinity

{Cycle 1 should consist of movements that display the presence, power and technique of the elder gods. The Elder gods being Zeus, Poseidon and Hades who can be introduced to the audience during the prologue or immediately after For this production, Hades was chosen to remain in statue form until half-way through performance. The other elder gods were introduced to the audience after the performances in the prologue of the elder goddesses and the servant gods. The elder gods awaken 1 by 1 instead of in groups like previously performed. }

Poseidon is first. His awakening shall be signaled by the sound cue of thunder and roaring ocean waves, giving the illusion that he is rising from within the deep seas. Once awakened from his slumber, Poseidon will render a non-traditional “bo staff” weapon form. (*Accordingly, since he is Poseidon his Bo staff should actually be designed to represent with Poseidon’s “trident”.*

Thus, he will have a trident made out of a bo staff, using this as both his weapon and his ruling scepter.)

After completing his form, Poseidon will thrust his trident into the heavens (cue thunderous

sound) and release a powerful Ki-hap(a yell with energy) and rest on his throne in the heavens. This action results in Poseidon encouraging his brother, King Zeus to join in the pageantry of divinity. Zeus is flattered and quickly exits from his throne to join the festivities. Zeus powerfully must break from his statue, enter the realm of the fellow gods and in symbolic representation of his historic lightning bolt he will perform an exciting sword form. After the completion of his form, Zeus releases a commanding yell throughout the heavens commanding the entire kingdom of gods, to join him an ancestral martial art form. *(This form should be representative of the unity of the Olympian kingdom.)* After the pageant of Divinity, the gods retire through stylized movement back to their jurisdictions. The stylization of movement should signal to the audience a scene change

-End Cycle one-

Cycle Two –Peace on Earth

Setting – Earth, Athens specifically

Time – Mid day, after the pageant of divinity

The beginning of cycle two should reveal a concurrent celebration in the land of the Greeks, that is similar to the pageant of the gods. As the gods retire to their kingdom, the Greek society enters the stage area from house right and left in celebration of their peaceful community. The female Greeks, will perform Ribbon dancing and basic tumbling. The more advanced Greeks, will perform advance martial arts display. After the celebration of the Greeks has commenced the demi-gods will enter the stage. Hercules the lead demi-god and most skillful, enters the stage with a gymnastics combination of round-off, back handspring (3x in a row). *(It is important that the demi-gods, use as much gymnastics talent as possible. The combinations used should be adjusted to fit the children's gymnastics abilities)* Once, in Athens, the demi-gods will execute a

martial arts form, that demonstrates power and resistance. After the completion of this form, the Greeks, will circle and dance around the demi-gods in celebration of their power and protection of the Athens society. Once, the dancing is complete, demi-gods and high ranked Greeks, will perform martial arts kicking tricks together. This celebration goes on until, the sound of rumble, thunder and lightning are heard. (*Thunder is best represented by a drum*)

-End of Cycle two –

Cycle Three – The Consumption of Hades

Setting – Athens and the Underworld

Time – Whenever

The Greeks party is quickly interrupted by the jealousy of Hades. He breaks his statue in a violent way, ignores the heavens and instantly takes human form on Earth. It is time to start his plan to overthrow Zeus. Hades breaks into the temple of the Greeks. He tortures the community, and petrifies as many people as he can. Throughout his reign of terror Hades, steals the souls of many Greek citizens. He then recognizes the presence of the demi-gods and attempts to steal their souls. The power of the demi-gods is enough to resist Hades for a short time, but eventually they too will lose their souls. Soon, because of the cries of the Greek people, Poseidon rushes from his kingdom to help protect society. With his trident he sends a bolt of energy through Hades, knocking Hades backwards. The blow is strong but not enough to stop Hades, Hades simply continues forward with his soul stealing. Rushing to the aid of his brother Poseidon, Zeus leaves Mt. Olympus to fight by Poseidon's side, in protection of the Greeks. The three brothers, battle fiercely in attempt to contain the raging Hades. Because of the sound the battle of the three brothers, the elder goddesses, rush from Mt. Olympus in attempt to either cease the emergent war or contain Hades. Just as Zeus, knocks Hades to the ground, he is

engulfed with anger and attempts to slay Hades. Hera, rushes towards Zeus, thrust her hand towards his body and commands him to cease the slaying of Hades. The other gods withdraw from the fight except for Zeus, in response to queen Hera. Hera deceiving Zeus convinces him to lower his guard. Hera then attacks Zeus, steals his lightning bolt and along with Persephone stand by Hades side. The other Olympians realizing they have been tricked, attempt to battle the three mutinous gods. Hades then raises his army of zombies from the dead (the Greek souls he stole), and outnumbers the remaining Olympians. The Olympians fight their way out of the ambush and retreat back to outskirts of Mt. Olympus.

-End of Cycle Three-

Cycle Four – The battle for Olympus

Setting – Athens

Time – as soon as possible

This cycle is marked by the stage right and stage left entrances of the warring armies of Hades and Athena. Both armies, circle the field, analyze their opponents and come to battle formation for attack based at the commands of their generals Hades and Athena. The two sides commence a battle that only gods can withstand. *(The battle is rough, fierce, deadly and primal. This battle should consist of traditional Tae Kwon Do, gymnastics, Greco-Roman wrestling, Kickboxing and magic. The battle should be epic.)* There are deaths from both sides. As the war rages on, Hades and Athena meet in the middle of the field for a ‘winner takes all’ battle. The two generals battle to the death. The battle proves equal for both generals. Neither can seem to get the upper hand of the fight. As the evil gods, continue to destroy the Athens land, the turmoil of the war reaches the realm of the magical community.

-End of cycle four –

Cycle five- United we stand...

Setting: The battle field

Time: same time as the battle

As the battle of the gods continues, the magical community unites on a pilgrimage towards the war. Together the magical community is strong and responsible for the world's magic that united together is a powerful damaging force. The magical community senses where the battle is ensuing and rushes onto the field. This happens just as Hades, Hera and Persephone have managed to take gain an upper hand in the battle and is about to slay Zeus. (*This slaying will seal Hades position as the new king of the gods and ruler of the Earth*). Just as Hades raises Zeus' sword in attempt to thrust it through his heart, the magical being rush forward and ignite the magic in the wands strong enough to knock the sword from Hades hand and throw him to the ground. The magical community then uses their collective power to freeze Hera and Persephone. Hades walks from around Zeus' altar and attempts to destroy the magical community. However, Hades is weakened from the battle and does not have much strength to command his full power. The magical community ignites their wands again and knocks Hades to the ground. This has given Athena enough time to regain some strength to continue to fight Hades. As Hades gets up from the ground, Athena rushes towards him and delivers a kick flying through the air to the Chest of Hades. Hades is knocked to the ground the magical community rushes in on him and wrestles him to stillness. The king of the magical community runs onto the battle field and delivers a powerful blow to the face of Hades, weakening him to the point of surrendering. Hades awakens from his defeat and realizes he was fool to war against his divine family. Hades then ceases his army's advancement and draws a treaty with Athena. Athena ceases her army accepts the treaty from Hades and together they combine their power to restore the Athenian land back to its peaceful state.

-End of cycle five –

Epilogue – Restoration

After the Greek land is restored to its original state, the entire divinity, the demi-gods and a few high ranked Greeks celebration this restoration with a large group choreographed martial arts form. *(The form should be creative, demonstrate power, resistance and unity at the same time. It is a grand form, therefore this form should be flashier than the other forms used throughout the show.)*

-End of Show -

Appendix C

Summary Description of the foundational principles

Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum

As described by Donzell Lewis and Olisa Enrico-Johnson for the

2010 Black Theatre Network Annual Conference

Workshop Presentation

The use of Ritual Poetic Drama Within the African Continuum (Ritual) as a Tool for Theatre Training: Empowering the artist to become self-actualized.

How do we connect to our original creative content? How does community play into collaboration and devising theatre? There is a holistic methodology of actor training that addresses the needs of a new language with inclusive terminology in a multicultural world. Healthy artists make healthy art and through the connection too our ancestry we become spiritually and mentally sound. Self-actualized artists are effective and concerned students.

Ritual is a holistic methodology of theatre training and provides an effective model for Acting, Directing and Playwriting through connecting the student/artist to the roots of the dramatic form as expressed through African centered principles of community and collaboration. This methodology is especially effective among diverse populations because it meets the artist where they are in the continuum and does not ask that they leave themselves outside, to deny who they are or where they come from- no matter where that is.

Using the drum; Dance power/Music power/Word power, improvisation, creation and Rite of Passage Journey. We will focus on the aspects of Ritual that connect the artist/participant to their individual/unique content and their authentic voice. Through facilitated guided imagery journey, guided automatic writing and providing a safe space and a supported platform for the expression of that writing through sound, movement and spoken word, the student/artist may speak from the spirit through the body with the voice.

Appendix D

Description of Releasing Ki: Tae Kwon Do for the Actor

First developed for submission in the 2010 VASTA annual conference

Releasing Ki: Tae-Kwon-Do for the Actor

A study in the cross discipline practices of tae kwon do for effective voice and speech

Releasing Ki: Tae-Kwon-Do for the Actor explores the ancient art of Tae-Kon-Do and it's positive uses for actors in the areas of Voice, Presence and Power. For years the study of Tae-Kwon-Do has been used to improve physical fitness, speed, and agility. With over an estimated 30 million practitioners in the world there is no doubt that Tae-Kwon-Do is an effective tool for personal training. Ki energy is life-force or life-energy of the universe that provides power and presence when manifested within individuals. With this being acknowledged, what happens when you combine one of the world's oldest martial art forms, with the world's most powerful act of storytelling? This workshop will begin to answer that question. **"Releasing Ki"** explores the benefits of training actors in the historic principles and practices of tae-kwon-do while focusing on how this training affects presence, connection, and the ability of the actor to tap into the power of a supported release of sound. Through combining both physical movement and internal (Ki) breath support the actor will find a grounded state of readiness supporting them for modern and classical text. Physically, Tae-Kwon-Do conditions the actor. Vocally the actor finds a physical and internal connection to their ki energy and breath. Tae-Kwon-Do for the actor will prepare artists for work in the classroom, rehearsals, and on the stage.

VITA

Donzell Parnell Lewis was born on October 17, 1984 in French Camp, California and is an American citizen. He graduated from John Marshall High, in Richmond, Virginia in 2002. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Performance from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia in 2007 where he concurrently worked actively as an actor, director, dramaturge , solo performer and martial arts instructor for the past five years.